

## Chapter 1 – Fate’s Judgement

As the rising sun spread its light over both London, wizards and muggles alike prepared for the new day, hoping that there would not be another catastrophe reported in the morning paper.

Whilst the muggles were still unaware of the cause of all this, for the remainder of the resistance against the Dark Lord’s onslaught, this day was just as gloomy as every other day. Nonetheless, they would live another day, and they found relief in the light that bathed the entire city.

Well, most of it at least.

In Knockturn alley, a robed figure could be seen moving rapidly through the shadow that seemed native to the place with a package in his hands. If one could look closely under the hood and past the various Notice-me-not charms, they would see two ferocious emerald eyes that shone with power and a lightning bolt scar almost covered by long raven hair.

If one was close enough, they would be able to hear him mutter

“Common, just a little longer...damn anti-apparition wards....must take the orb back to HQ”

The orb this young man was carrying was none other than the ancient orb known as Iudicious Parcaesi, famed to be as old as the veil of death and once belonging to Rowena Ravenclaw herself, now a Hoxcrux for Tom Marvolo Riddle. The Dark Lord had initially acquired it for its fabled connection to granting the bearer’s wishes, and hoped it would grant him immortality or absolute power, but failing that, it made a good place to put a seventh of his soul in.

Even though this was the fifth Hoxcrux Harry had found, the war was not going well for the light side. Hogwarts had shutdown and, in the absence of Dumbledore and the Staff, was soon ransacked and destroyed by Voldemort’s forces. The ministry was fighting a desperate war, and corruption within it was increasing daily.

As for Harry Potter, well, he had lost much. Too much some would say. Ron and Hermione had died hunting down the Hoxcruxes, Lupin lay comatose at St-Mungos, and the Order had lost most of its members, including Hagrid, Mad-Eye and McGonagall. Meanwhile, the death of Ginny at Bellatrix's hands had torn Harry's heart, making him doubt himself and everyone around him.

The war had been hard on him, and he turned to the Dark Path for the power to fight. *'Dark Path!'* He mentally scoffed when he heard that for the first time *'Like there is such a thing as dark...how pointless...there is not good or evil, there is only power, and those too weak to wield it.'* The increasing darkness within his heart had created tension between him and what was left of the order. Almost everyone, except Ginny before her death just a month ago, began to fear him. Harry James Potter was a powerful dark wizard, and he was proud of it. He was strong enough to defeat any Death Eater or Auror, and could stand his own against the Dark Lord, though killing him was another matter.

Suddenly, two Dozen Death eaters and the Dark Lord arrived by port-key at the area.

"Damn" muttered Harry.

The Dark Lord moved forwards, saying in a mocking tone:

"Ahh...Potter...I see you have managed to acquire another one of my hoxcruxes... ....you have really become quite the nuisance boy!"

"I live to serve Tom, you know just how much I love you"

"Do not mock me boy....It has been fun toying with you, but I fear that I have had enough of you...AVADA KEDAVRA!"

The green light came towards Harry, quickly followed by more killing curses from the Death Eaters. Knowing he had no time to move or retaliate, Harry did the first thing that came to his mind:

He put the orb in the path of Voldemort's Killing curse.

He had prepared himself for the end of his 21 tiring years of life, and he silently made a prayer for another chance at life, without this accursed burden, when something no-one expected happened. Fate owed him another chance after all; he had suffered too much in his short life.

Just as the killing curse struck the orb, it emitted an eerie blue hue. The very air around Harry started shimmering, and the curses stopped in midair. Then he felt a tug more painful and powerful than any port-key. At that time he could have sworn he heard a ghostly and melodic voice say in his mind: "*So be it*"

Harry Potter's last conscious thought was '*What the...?*'

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Groaning, Harry Potter awoke in a room surrounded with white. He relaxed when he recognized the Hogwarts infirmary and prepared himself for Madam Pomfrey's chiding which, over the past years, had become quite welcome.

Then he froze. '*Hogwarts? But...it was destroyed...how?*' He reached for his glasses only to realise that his body was no longer the one he was used to...' *I'm...eleven? Okay, this must be a really weird dream, so I would like to wake up about NOW*' He pinched himself to make sure this is not a dream. His pinch was so strong that he let out a small whimper, which attracted the attentions of Madam Pomfrey.

"I swear, what were you thinking Mr Potter? Diving after the snitch like that...I don't know what McGonagall was thinking...putting such a young player on the team"

She quickly poured some of the familiar foul-tasting potions down his throat.

"There you go Mr Potter, you are as good as new. And please, in your next Quiddich practice, make sure you don't fly in the air, not into the ground."

*'What? Fall? But where...how?'* Thought a clearly disturbed Harry. Then, images of him flying after the snitch and into the ground came to his mind...and it was suddenly as if he had two sets of memories.

*'What the Devil is going on?'* He scurried away from the Hospital Wing before Madam Pomfrey could find anything else wrong with him. As he walked past the familiar Halls, he started reviewing the second set of memories. It seemed similar to his normal ones, and for a moment he thought he might have gone back in time, until one image came to him.

It was Neville. Neville looking much like he had seen him in his first year, but with one crucial difference: A lightning bolt scar on his forehead. *'Oh boy'* He thought, touching his forehead to find nothing there. Memories of conversations about Neville with Ron came to his mind *'Neville is the boy-who-lived'*

Images flew into his mind: Hagrid telling him that his parents were killed by death eaters, Hagrid telling him that You-Know-Who is gone thanks to Neville, him meeting Neville on the train and talking about him with Ron. *'Just what the hell is going on?'*

Harry unconsciously started walking towards the Gryffindor Dorms, thinking along the way, trying to find the solution to what happened when he came upon it *'Ravenclaw's Orb! It had something to do with granting wishes...perhaps the killing curse made it transport me to another dimension? Or was it my wish?'* He had heard of theories of Parallel Universes before, but nobody had actually travelled to one, *'Though'* he thought *'If they actually did, they were probably never believed, or they just kept their mouths shut'*.

According to his memories from this life, his first year had been pretty much the same, with the troll bringing Him, Ron and Hermione together, with Norbert and the encounter in the forbidden forest as well as him making Gryffindor Seeker, though it was a Hufflepuff's remember-ball and not Neville's that he caught. From what he could remember, it would soon be the day that, in his old world, they went after the Philosopher's Stone. Speaking of which, it seems that the new boy-who-lived had a much more active role in hunting after the stone (and Snape) than Harry would have thought possible.

As he looked at his past in this world, he noticed that Neville's status had given him more confidence, and even a slight air of Arrogance. Though he was not as much of a prick as Malfoy, he was the golden boy of Gryffindor. He did not really belong in any group, but he was fairly good friends with Harry, as they could both relate to each other, being orphans of the war. Neville rushed into situations, and was more hot-headed than Ron had ever been, but he was still brave and self-sacrificing.

Harry wondered what state his magic was in. After his sixth year, he had undergone many rituals and trained hard, finally cultivating his talent in the Dark Arts making him a legend, and many feared his wrath almost as much as they feared a Death Eater raid.

He was pleased to note that not only was his magic strong, but it had actually increased slightly after merging with the magic of his other self. He was also delighted to learn that he had retained his parseltongue ability, which was useful for some nice dark spells he learnt.

He grinned. *'If my magic has merged with that of my other self...then that means I have the potential to be much more powerful than ever before...I still have to develop the new magic I gained, but that should be easy...I have already done it once before after all!'*

Then he turned his thoughts to why he was here.

*'But even with the orb, why did I get sent here and at this time?'* He remembered that Hermione had said that Ravenclaw often referred to her orb as Fate's Judge. *'Guess it just judged my plea worthy enough to send me here...It would make sense, if that voice I heard was real... I'll see if I can get my hands on its counterpart in this world...but until then, I will live my second chance'*

As he approached the Fat Lady, Harry realised for the first time just what being here meant. He had another chance, one more shot at life, a life where he could make things right.

And this chance wouldn't be spoiled by a good-natured but still manipulative old coot, a meddlesome Order and an infantile megalomaniac Dark Lord with serious attitude problems. In this

universe, Harry James Potter would show the world just what true power means.

Harry Potter smirked in a way that would have sent any First Year Hufflepuffs (or even Gryffindors for that matter) scurrying away in fear. It was an evil smirk of someone who had seen, and committed, a lot of violence in his life. It was the smirk of a seasoned war veteran and one of the most powerful dark wizards in the world.

Giving the password his memory told him of, he entered the Gryffindor Common Room happier than he had been in a long time.

*'This would be fun indeed'*

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## Chapter 2 – Brave New World

As the 11-year old body of a 21 year old warrior named Harry Potter entered the Gryffindor Common room for the first time in this alternate world, a group of familiar faces converged on him.

“HARRY” Bellowed a frantic Hermione, “Are you alright? We were so worried when you hit the ground! What did Madam Pomfrey say? Is there any serious injury?”

“You just had to fly into the ground instead of in the air, didn’t you mate?” Said a smirking Ron, obviously happy to see his best friend alright

“Perhaps you should train a bit more in the flying part of seeking Harry, it helps to be in the air you know” Said Neville amidst gales of laughter “You are lucky Pomfrey let you out, when I got injured on Sunday, she wouldn’t let me out of her claws, no matter how well I felt”.

For a moment, an expression of shock and sadness went through Harry’s features, before he schooled his face into the expressionless face that he had become so accustomed to during the war.

*‘So many dead people ...I did not expect that it would be so hard to see them all again...I can’t take all the memories’* Inside, Harry’s heart was aching from the sudden flood of memories from the war. On the outside, he kept the mask which would have made Salazar Slytherin himself impressed.

His friends noticed that, for they were now looking at him in confusion.

“You...alright mate?” asked Ron.

*‘Damn...need to watch my behaviour over here...I am not exactly a seasoned veteran anymore...I just hope no-one tries to wake me up at night.’*

“Sorry Ron, I’m fine, just had a little headache there for a moment. Flying into the ground is not on my top 5 of activities” He said,

transforming his expression to that of a tired schoolboy without breaking a sweat

“Good to see you’re alright Harry” said Ron “Up for a game of Chess?”

“Yes, watch Harry lose to our great chess master one more time” Said Neville getting up “I’m glad you’re alright Harry, I’ll see you in an hour or so, I have to finish an essay for that slimy git that calls himself a potions teacher”

*‘Yep, Neville’s definitely different’* mused Harry, moving towards some chairs to play with Ron. *‘Now to show Mr Chessmaster just what you can pick up in 10 years’*

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Several hours and chess games later, which were not interrupted even to go for dinner, (eventually brought to them by an impatient Hermione), a furious and still hungry Ron banged the chessboard as his king fell, for the 10th time in a row that day.

“What the hell is going on?” He said “How can you beat me? And ten times too?”

Most of the first years that had gathered nearby to watch the historic event of Ron Weasley losing at chess snickered.

“I guess it is just my natural talent shining through Ron” Said an elated Harry, proud to have beaten Ron for the first time in either dimension. “It was only a matter of time before I would beat you, and I guess that I had to win a lot to make up for a year of losses”

Ron just went lay back into the chair “You don’t understand Harry, chess is supposed to be MY area, no-one is supposed to beat me at chess, just like no-one is supposed to beat the twins at pranks”

“Don’t worry Ron, you are still an excellent chess player, and you will only get better if you have someone to challenge you. And besides, while the Gred and Forge are excellent at pranks, they wouldn’t stand up against my father, the Great Prongs, and his group of marauders.



He holds the record for most detentions and most points deducted, ever.”

Ron just sulked further while the other first years looked mildly interested in the information, but were more focused on Neville, who had started commenting on how nothing will ever be the same again, now that Ron lost in chess *‘He doesn’t know how close to the truth he is’* thought Harry.

Just then the twins approached him and dragged him to a secluded corner of the common room, with looks of awe on their faces.

“Your father was”

“The one and only”

“The great”

“The magnificent”

“Prongs?”

“Yep, Prongs, Padfoot, Moony and Wormtail, they made quite the group didn’t they?” he answered, inwardly seething at the mention of Pettigrew’s name. *‘Which reminds me...I need to capture Scabbers and free Sirius’*

“Bugger Harry”

“They are legends they are”

“Our heroes”

“Our inspiration”

“Great people inspiring every new generation of pranksters”

“You heard of them?” asked Harry, thinking of perhaps getting the map earlier than last time, if he could.

“Heard of them?”

“We practically adore them!”

“You see Harry”

“Back in our first year”

“When we were young and innocent”

Harry scoffed at this. “Innocent?”

“Well, more so than now”

“Yes, well anyway, we had the misfortune of being taken to Flitch’s office”

“Long story short, we managed to”

“Borrow a certain artefact”

“That belonged to that great father of yours”

*‘Now’s my chance’* “You found the Marauder’s map?” Asked Harry, feigning a look of total surprise.

The twin’s jaws dropped

“You know about the map? But....How?”

“Ahh, a good wizard never reveals his secrets, didn’t you know that Forge?”

“How did you recognize who I am?”

“Yeah, even Mum has difficulty telling us apart”

Harry just grinned and walked away, thinking about how he could get the map at a later date. He prepared to go up to his dormitory, when Hermione screeched at him

“Harry! You can’t leave yet! You have to practice transfiguration for McGonagall! You had real trouble with it in class!”

“Ahhh, and what exactly should I transfigure Mione?”

“Turn piece of wood into a Quill, you know that Harry! Your wood barely became a little sharper in class. And since when do you call me Mione?”

Harry said nothing and pointed his wand at some nearby pieces of wood that Hermione had set aside for practising. Without saying anything, he waved his wand and they all turned into elegant golden quills. He turned back to Hermione and found that her jaw had dropped to the floor. Everyone who had noticed what he did stared at him in surprise and awe as well.

“I think I’ll be just fine in class tomorrow, now if you will excuse me, I’m going to bed.” *‘I really shouldn’t be showing off like this...but it is so much fun...and this will teach them that I am not going to be a bystander in this war’*

As he sat in his bed, he started wondering about this new world. *‘I will have to go after the Hoxcruxes again. It is a good thing I know where they are now...though I will have to wait until the old tosser comes back, because their hiding spots are sealed when he does not have a body... though he won’t get one if I capture Scabbers...’* Then, he froze. He couldn’t remember Ron having a pet in this dimension.

*‘Where is Pettigrew? And for that matter, where is Sirius? He didn’t raise me...so is he in Azkaban here too? Or is he dead?’*

He resolved to have a talk with Dumbledore in the future about this. Yawning, he fell asleep in a bed he had not been in for 10 years.

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Harry woke up at dawn, a habit he had picked up during the war. Groaning, he looked around at the still sleeping figures of the people around him. Thinking about what he should do, he decided to go for a run outside. *‘After all, I should be getting this body into shape. Quidditch helps, but I can be so much more if I start now. Perhaps I should visit the Room of Requirement Later and see if I can get some duelling practice in there’*

He ran past the empty common room and the silent halls, going out in the sunny day and beginning his rounds around the lake. He had barely gone around once when he started panting *'Damn, I forgot just how weak an eleven year-old's body can be'* He decided to rest and then do some flexibility exercises he learnt from Mad-Eye.

Above him, an elderly Headmaster watched the boy from a window. He was immensely surprised when he started performing exercises normally used in Auror school and by top duellists to get into shape and keep themselves fit. He walked away from the window to get ready for breakfast, putting the boy in the back of his mind, as he thought about the wards around the stone.

Meanwhile, Harry, having finished with his exercises, went into the Great Hall, where many students were already munching at their breakfast, many of them still bleary-eyed. He walked over to the Gryffindor table and sat down between Ron and Hermione. He put some food on his plate, noticing that they were casting him furtive looks. He decided not to comment until they said something.

"Uhh...mate..." Started Ron

"Harry, how did you do all that?" interrupted Hermione.

Harry sat back and drank some pumpkin juice. Then he wiped his mouth and put his glass down. He slowly turned towards Hermione and asked:

"Do all of what exactly?"

"Transfigure all those pieces wood at the same time! Without speaking! and into gold too!" She responded frantically.

"Yea mate, and beating me in chess 10 times, as well as gaining the awe of the twins." Added Ron.

"As I told Fred and George, a good wizard never reveals his secrets" He responded, turning back towards his breakfast.

"Harry! We're your friends!" Said Ron.

"You are, but that does not mean I cannot keep some secrets. If you must know, it is all a matter of natural talent coupled with hard work."

"But Harry! How could you possibly do it? It is not supposed to be possible at our age! Multiple Non-Verbal Transfiguration involving precious metals like gold can only be done by very powerful wizards!" Said Hermione in one breath.

Harry grinned. "Exactly Mione, so I guess that shows that I am a very powerful wizard, right?"

"But , But..." she stammered

"Mate, where were you this morning? Your bed was empty." Said Ron

"I was having a run out in the grounds. It can help with Quidditch, and it also gets me into better duelling form" Answered Harry.

"Duelling? What on earth would you be duelling for Harry?" Cut in Hermione.

"It is about later in life. It could turn out to be useful. Now, if your interrogation is over, I would like to eat my breakfast thank you very much" Snapped Harry.

They remained quiet after that, but he could tell they were not satisfied. He finished his food quickly and got up for his next lesson, Potions with Snape.

*'I sure hope that idiot tries to pick on me. I need some fun today'*

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Snape billowed into the classroom in his usual menacing mood "Today we shall be brewing a simple weak headache relief potion. Though I am sure most of you dunderheads will be unable to do even that." He cast Harry an evil glance as he said this. "Instructions are on the board, BEGIN"

Harry knew this potion by heart, having brewed it countless times both at Hogwarts and after he left. It was after all a first year potion,

and he had a 21 year old mind. He quickly collected the ingredients and started to brew as if he was in a trance. Hermione and Ron looked at him surprised, as he moved with years of careful practice.

Harry then felt a legilimency probe. It seems Snape had noticed the ease with which he moved and decided to investigate further. *'It's time for some fun'* He concentrated his occlumency shields, then suddenly slammed them to full strength, making the attack rebound and cause a serious headache for Snape.

"OWW" Cried Snape

The class all stared at him, but they were too scared to comment.

"What are you staring at?" He snarled angrily "Get back to your Potions!"

Harry looked directly into his professor's eyes and smirked. Snape looked a mixture between confused, scared and extremely angry. Harry smirked and poured the final ingredients into his potion, and began stirring it as required. Snape walked next to him and shouted

"Potter you dunderhead, the potion requires only clockwise steering, not anti-clockwise! You ruined it!"

Paying no attention to him, Harry continued stirring as before

"Are you listening to me Potter? The potion is supposed to turn from blue to emerald, yours will never do that if you keep on like that"

*'Time for some fun'* Thought Harry. He stopped stirring, looked into his professor's eyes, and while pointing at his potion he said "Emerald Green comes about...NOW." Just then, the potion turned emerald. Harry smirked at the professor that now looked livid.

"The potion seems to have turned from blue to emerald to me *sir*" He said, managing to make *sir* sound as if it was an insult.

Snape gaped like a fish for a few moments until he finally gathered his wits.

"5 points from Gryffindor for not following orders, 5 for disrespect and another 5 for cheating!" He bellowed.

"Cheating professor? Now, can you prove that? The instructions you gave are not the only way to brew that potion as you very well know, sir. But then again, you are such a greasy git, I would be surprised if you knew anything at all"

"20 points for cheek! Detention on Sunday at 8 pm. NOW GET OUT!"

Inwardly laughing, Harry collected his materials and left potions class in a great mood. Everybody else was staring at him with their jaws open.

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After class, Ron, Hermione and Neville approached him

"Wow mate" Said Ron looking at him with reverence "You said it damn straight to Snape"

"Yeah Harry, you really showed him back there" Said an enthusiastic Neville.

"You shouldn't have done that Harry" Said Hermione, going into bossy mode "Professor Snape is our teacher and deserves our respect and..."

"Hermione, that greasy git deserves no respect whatsoever!" Interrupted Ron

"Ronald! Watch your language! You need to have respect for the teachers of this school..."

"Ooooh, is the know-it-all displaying what a know-it-all she is?" Came an arrogant voice from behind them

Harry spun around fast, his wand in his grip and pointing at a pale face before it could blink.

"Malfoy" He hissed, hate evident in his voice.

"Potter, what's wrong? Crying over you muggle-loving filth of parents? Couldn't take potions so you decided to cheat?" Sneered Malfoy.

*'Oh, I know what to do now'* Thought Harry.

"Tell me Malfoy, has anyone ever told you that you look like a ferret?"

"Who do you think you are Pott.."

"Because I say that not only do you look like one, but you are one!" With those words, Harry jabbed his wand at Malfoy, turning into the same ferret the fake Moody had turned him in his fourth year.

"Behold! Its Malfoy! The amazing Bouncing Ferret!" *'Merlin, being a child once more is fun, though I will not be able to go around like this for much longer'* The Gryffindors around him collapsed in gales of laughter.

"MR POTTER! What are you doing?" Bellowed a furious McGonagall, running to the scene.

"Giving a lesson in attitude."

"A lesson in att....IS THAT A STUDENT?"

"Yep, Malfoy decided it would be wise to attack me" His friends looked surprised at him for lying, but said nothing about it.

"Change him back this instant Mr Potter."

"Certainly" He waived his wand at the ferret, changing him back and at the same time casting a charm that interfered with thoughts of a person, temporarily making them more aggressive and violent.

As soon as Malfoy turned back, he pulled out his wand and started throwing hexes at Harry, but the latter merely waved his wand and Malfoy was sent slamming into a wall, falling unconscious.

"See what I mean Professor? Such hostility and attitude problems, he really needs somebody to teach him how to behave."



McGonagall gaped at his display of non-verbal magic, but gathered her wits together.

“10 points from Gryffindor and detention for fighting in the hallways. Please move along now. Mr Potter.”

Harry left, followed by his still laughing but amazed friends and an exasperated Hermione.

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### Chapter 3 – The Stone

Over the next days, most teachers and students came to see the changes in the raven haired Potter. None could find a reasonable explanation as to why a first-year student was able to perform magic that in many instances was beyond the Hogwarts curriculum. Whispers filled the halls as Harry passed by, a fact that he was used to in his previous world, and he revelled in the fact that this time round, they were talking about what he had actually done, not what his Mother's sacrifice led to.

Due to his skill and power, Gryffindor had quickly come to the top in house points. This had made him popular with the other students in his house, but the constant displays of what he could do, coupled with his warrior attitude had made more than one first year slightly intimidated by him.

But he knew that he could not go around behaving like Malfoy and his merry band of Slytherins, hexing anyone they wanted

*'Though that would be fun, I think I have had enough for now...I do have a war to fight after all...and I have to see about the Philosopher's stone...I know I've been showing off but hey, I won't have another chance to be a child!'*

With all the fun he had showing off he didn't notice how soon exams came. Naturally it was easy for him to ace them, especially since he did not have to face pains in his scar this time (though he made sure to give Neville some headache relief potion)

Naturally, he had to deal with Hermione going over and over each exam, while Ron complained that it gave him a headache just thinking about it. *'I'll definitely have to get those two together much sooner here...better make sure I avoid the entire Krum business too...'*

Neville kept complaining about his scar hurting, and kept on suggesting that Snape would try and get the stone soon, but both Hermione and Ron dismissed his claims, With Hermione telling him to visit the hospital wing and blaming it on stress.

Harry kept silent most of the time, thinking about how he could direct his friends to go after the stone. Then he hit upon it, he just had to do what he did in first year.

“Hey, don’t you find it strange that thing Hagrid wants the most is a dragon, and suddenly a stranger comes along who just happens to have one? Breeding dragons is illegal, so Hagrid must have been awfully lucky to find someone who breeds them...unless it was not a coincidence...” He said.

“You think...that...You-Know-Who got that person...so he could learn how to get past fluffy?” Asked Neville

“Yes...I mean, Hagrid is trustworthy and all, but it WAS Hog’s Head...and getting his dream along with a few pints could have...loosened his tongue...”

As expected, Hagrid let it slip that he had told the stranger that music would turn Fluffy from a ferocious dog to a harmless and sleeping puppy.

The quartet left for the castle, but were stumped when they tried to find the Headmaster. When McGonagall came along, Neville, Hermione and Ron tried desperately to explain to her the situation. Harry remained silent, but when she started walking away after scolding them, he decided to challenge his luck and cried out

“Are you sure that the stone is very well protected professor? This IS Voldemort we are talking about...I would be willing to bet 100 galleons that even we, first years, would be able to get past any protections you have...”

“That will be enough Potter! You may have shown that you are more advanced than the other first years, but I think it has gone to your head! The stone is well protected. This discussion is over, unless you four would like a detention!” she said, leaving

“We go for the stone, tonight” said Harry as soon as she was out of hearing range

"But what could we possibly..." Hermione was cut off by the arrival of professor Snape

"Good Evening" he said, with fake politeness

Before anyone could respond, Harry answered "Yes, it is a nice day outside isn't it? Far to nice to be spent in here..."

Snape shot him a strange look and continued "The way you are standing close to each other, someone might think that you are...plotting...something."

"Oh but we are professor, you see, we were discussing which would be the best way to take down a Cerberus. We even asked Hagrid for some help, and he gave us the best solution! Which I am sure that such an intelligent wizard as yourself would know."

"Been wondering in the forbidden corridor Potter? If I ever catch you out at night again, I will personally make sure you are expelled! 5 points from Gryffindor, now get Lost!" With one last glare at Harry, Snape walked away, robes billowing menacingly

*'I have to learn how he does that, it would really help intimidate some annoying people.'*

"Harry! What is up with you? First questioning McGonagall, now practically giving away to Snape the fact that we know he is after the st.." started Neville

"Snape is not after the stone." Cut in Harry

"What? Are you alright mate? Of course he is! He even tried to get past the dog on Halloween!" Countered Ron

"I know what I am talking about here Ron, trust me, it is not him. I will be going there tonight anyway"

"You can't do that Harry! Snape and McGonagall will kill you! Or worse, expel you!"

"No, he is right Hermione, we have to stop this, otherwise You-Know-Who will come back and start another reign of terror" said Neville.

"There is no "we", I'm going alone"

"We won't let you go alone Harry, that evil bastard killed both of my parents, I'll be damned if I let him come back"

"Neville's right mate, we're Gryffindors, we're coming with you." Said Ron.

*'They aren't going to back down...oh well, there's a reason why they're Gryffindors as Ron said.'* "Fine, we will go tonight under the invisibility cloak...I don't know whether it will be big enough for all 4 of us though..."

"Oh, that won't be a problem Harry, I asked Gran to send me my dad's invisibility cloak, I got it yesterday." Said Neville.

"Very well then" sighed Harry "lets get back to the dorms for now."

*'And I hope I'm doing the right thing'*

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After evading a peeved Peeves and a nosy Mrs Norris, the quartet eventually came upon the open door on the third floor corridor.

"Snape is already here!" cried Neville

"I'm telling you Neville, its not Snape. Aww, would you look at that, Fluffy is sleeping. He looks so cute..."

"Cute Harry? Are you out of your bloody mind mate? That thing is NOT cute!" answered Ron

"Enough! We need to get through the hatch!" said Hermione

Neville frowned. "What's that noise?"

"Music, to make this doggy sleep, best keep it playing, its almost over." Said Harry, waving his wand and making the harp re-start.

“Now, lets get going” He opened the hatch, looking into it.

“Boy, is this dark. Well, I’m going first. I’ll see you down there, or at least, I hope I will.” with those words, he jumped into the darkness, softly landing on the dangerous plant known as Devil’s snare.

“Alright, jump in!” he called.

With three soft thuds, the rest of them arrived.

“Good thing this plant is here” exclaimed Ron.

“Good thing? This is Devil’s snare. It will tighten around you until you burst” Said Harry, as the vines started tightening around Ron and Neville.

“WHAT? Bloody hell!” shouted Ron.

Harry waved his wand and conjured a large fire. The vines immediately withdrew, leaving all of them unharmed. “Well then, lets get going shall we?” he asked.

“Good thing someone knows what to do around here” muttered Neville. “What’s that sound?”

“Dunno...sounds like a ghost...” Said Ron

“Or something Flying, now come on!” countered an impatient Harry.

“You seem awfully keen on leading us to our deaths Harry” commented Hermione

“There is no sense in standing around while Voldemort may be nearing the stone, so MOVE IT” Snapped Harry, ignoring the shivers that the dark lord’s name sent around the group.

They came to a room filled with hundreds of keys flying around. A door was standing on the other side of the room.

“Flying keys, how quaint, I bet one of them is the key to that door.” Said Harry.

“Reckon they’ll attack us if we try to get through?” Asked Ron

“Doubt it, but we will need to catch the right one.” Said Harry.

After passing through the room and trying to open the door by both might and magic, they turned towards the keys.

“We need to get on those brooms” Said Hermione pointing towards some brooms left leaning on the wall “and catch whichever key fits the hole”

“That sounds simple enough.” Said Neville, striding towards the brooms.

“That won’t be necessary. ACCIO” said Harry, concentrating his magic on overpowering the anti-summoning wards on the key he knew was the right one.

“Another pathetic protection. Seriously, what was that old coot who calls himself a headmaster thinking? How could this possibly keep away Voldemort?” muttered Harry

“Harry! Don’t talk about Dumbledore like that! He is the greatest wi...” started Hermione

“Yea Yea, whatever you say, now lets get going shall we?” snapped Harry.

They soon came to a giant chessboard.

“Looks like we have to play our way across...” said Ron.

Just like in Harry’s first year, Ron expertly played against the enchanted pieces, and once again became the willing sacrifice for Harry to get the white side’s king.

“RON” cried Hermione.

“Leave him, we must go on” Said Harry

They soon came to another room, and a foul stench filled the air. They immediately spotted the source: a large troll, lying unconscious on the floor.

“Glad that one’s gone, I wouldn’t want to have to face it.” Said Neville  
“Come on, let’s get out of here before the smell kills us.”

As they passed onto the next room, purple flames rose behind them, while black ones rose in front of them. In the middle of a table sat various potion bottles.

Hermione grabbed the parchment on the desk and read what was on it. “It’s a riddle! We have to use logic to find the right potion! Most wizards don’t use logic, they would be stumped!”

“Right...” Said Harry, barely glancing at the parchment and marching over to the smallest bottle, which he knew from experience was the right one, and downing its contents. “There is barely any potion left for you Neville. Hermione, the round-ish glass at the end of the row will let you go back. Make sure Ron’s okay and contact Dumbledore”

“HARRY! How could you just drink that! It could have been poison!”  
Cried Hermione

“I know what I am doing, look at the riddle for yourself. Lets go Neville” He answered, walking through the black flames.

“Harry, I don’t believe it, he’s right, how did he know?” she started questioning frantically, but Harry kept on walking.

With a nervous glance at Hermione, Neville downed the little that was left of the potion, and followed Harry into the flames. He entered the next room expecting to see Snape or Voldemort, but what he saw instead was someone totally unexpected.

“Pr-Professor Quirrell?” he stuttered.

The man turned “Yes Longbottom, me. I was wondering whether I would meet you here...and it seems that Potter is here too...”

“But...I thought that...that Snape” argued Neville



“Serverus? Yes, this would look like his job...compared to him, who would suspect me?”

Neville turned to the smirking Harry “You...You knew! But how?”

“Yes Neville, I knew” He answered “As to how, I think I will be keeping my reasons to myself.”

“That’s very nice Potter, but I think I’ve had enough interfering.” Said Quirrell, conjuring some ropes and binding the two boys with them. “Now if you will excuse me, I need to figure out how to get past this Mirror...what do I have to do? Break it? Master! Help me !”

“Use the boy” echoed a chilling voice around the chamber.

“Come here Longbottom!” Said Quirrell, unbinding him. Neville slowly walked towards the mirror. “What do you see?”

“Uhh...” Harry could clearly see the bulge in Neville’s pocket where the stone had fallen “I’m..Head of Auror department...and I am receiving my Merlin’s Order...”

“Get out of here boy” Said Quirrell, pushing him away

“He is lying” said the voice “He is lying to you”

“Come back here Longbottom” Cried Quirrell

“Let me speak to him” said the voice

“Master, you are not strong enough...”

“I am strong enough for this.”

Quirrell slowly unwound the turban he wore, revealing what looked like a second face in the back of his head. The face of Lord Voldemort.

“Neville Longbottom...” echoed his chilling voice.

Harry tuned out the usual charade of insults that the Dark Lord liked to throw at his seemingly helpless victims, and decided it is time he

joined the play. He concentrated his magic on his bindings, silently making them dissolve.

Just as he finished, Neville tried to run. Quirrell grabbed him with his left hand and, as Harry expected, the blood magic from his mother's sacrifice made that hand burn.

"Master! It Burns!"

"Then kill him!"

Before Neville could react, Quirrell had raised his other arm, making the boy fall and stop moving with an unspoken curse. He prepared to launch a lethal spell, when Harry stepped in.

"Not so fast Quirrell"

Quirrell turned so that Voldemort's face looked towards him.

"Harry James Potter...how nice...to meet you. Are you going to show some reckless Gryffindor courage and get killed?"

"Tom Marvolo Riddle. Nice to meet you too. How's daddy doing? Oh, I forgot, he's a muggle isn't he? And dead too...what a pity."

Voldemort appeared enraged by his remarks, and ordered Quirrell to bring him closer.

"You know too much boy...you will have to die for you knowledge..."

Neither of them noticed Neville stirring, recovering from the effects of the curse, but still unable to get up.

"I think not Tom"

"Really? And what makes you think so?"

"Well...maybe the fact that I was born as the seventh month dies....to those who have thrice defied you...ever heard of prophecies Tom?"

"How do you know about that?"

“The prophecy? How could I not know about that which predicts my rise to power? It’s a pity you didn’t hear whole thing...but then again, if you had, your fate might have been different.”

“And you...know the words of this prophecy boy? Tell me!”

“I don’t think so Riddle, it’s stored safe in my mind”

“We will see how safe it is in you mind! Legilimens!” Said Voldemort, while looking at Harry’s eyes. His red eye-slits widened in surprise and then in pain as the legilimency attack was violently countered by a smirking Harry.

“Interesting...an Occlumens...and at a young age...”

“I would love to stand and chat Tom, but I really need to get that stone and leave.” said Harry

“I don’t think so Potter! I get the stone, and our lovely chat ends now, Kill Him!” Ordered the Dark Lord.

Harry merely sidestepped the incoming curse Quirrell sent, and pointed his wand at Voldemort. “I don’t think so Riddle! AVADA KEDAVRA!”

Quirrell’s and Voldemort’s eyes flashed in surprise as they barely dodged the curse.

“Using such powerful Dark Arts Potter? Dumbledore and the light would be disappointed in you. Why don’t you join me Potter, and together we can rule the world!” Said Voldemort with an evil smile

“I hold no loyalty to that old fool Riddle...but that is quite an interesting proposition you have there...” answered Harry

“Yes...it will be the chance for you to reach greatness!” said an excited Voldemort

Meanwhile, Neville was watching the exchange with horror, unnoticed by the two figures.

“However...there are two little problems I have with that. First, you are a bastard, and I don't want to have to see your ugly face unless it is at the receiving end of one of my curses, and two, why should I share the world with you, when I could just as easily take it myself?”

Voldemort's features turned to those of utmost loathing. “Very well then. I see you are another misguided fool. Kill him!”

“I tire of our games Riddle! Sectumsempra! Condolescus! Deflagro!”

“Caedro! Concetius!” Cast Quirrel, while evading the other attacks. A fearsome duel began between the two dark wizards, with Neville watching in fascinated horror. Finally, just as Quirrel jumped out of the way of a nasty bone-shattering curse, Harry nailed him with an Avada Kedavra

A great rumbling noise was heard, and Neville fainted from the magical backlash, as for the second time in 10 years, Voldemort's soul was ripped from a body.

With blood dripping from his body, Harry concentrated on a self healing spell to at least minimize the bleeding. Having done that, he collapsed exhausted from the blood loss and magical strain. He was vaguely aware of other figures coming in, shouting his and Neville's names.

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A groaning Neville Longbottom groggily woke up in the Hogwarts infirmary. Then he froze remembering the stone. He looked up only to stare in the Twinkling blue eyes of Albus Dumbledore.

“Good Morning Neville.” Said the old wizard cheerfully.

“Sir! The stone! Quirrell! You-kno-who! Harry! Duel!” Neville started saying, fearing that Voldemort had the stone.

“Calm down Neville, we have destroyed the stone”

“You have? But then Flamel will...”

“Death is but the next great adventure Neville, and Flamel has been prepared for this day...he will have enough time to sort out his affairs.”

“Sir, what about Harry...and Ron?”

“They are both alright...though Harry seems to have been a recipient of a rather dark curse...It also seems that he was somehow healed before he got here, which is a good thing, considering we could not identify what he had been hit with”

“So they are...fine then?”

“Yes, and they have been rather worried about you as well. I believe you got quite a number of get well cards.” The old wizard said, gesturing towards the pile of cards and sweets on the table next to Neville. “Now Neville, I was wondering if you would enlighten me to what exactly went on during the confrontation with Quirrell. From what I understand he used you to get the stone out of the mirror” at this Neville nodded emphatically “but I would like to know how you two got away...”

“Well...” began Neville “After I got the stone, I tried to run. He grabbed me, but his hand burnt. He then sent a curse at me, and everything became dark. When I woke up, I could barely move, but I could hear You-know-who talking with Harry...Harry mentioned some prophecy...”

“A prophecy?” Asked a visibly surprised Dumbledore “What kind of prophecy?”

“Well, he said something about being born as the seventh month dies...he also claimed that it predicted his rise to power... Voldemort then tried some spell on Harry, but it failed, and he said something about Harry being an oculmens?”

“Occlumens...indeed...please continue Mr Longbottom” Said a headmaster who now looked even more surprised and in deep thought.

“Well, then You-know-who decided to attack him, but Harry cast some kind of spell, which Quirrell barely avoided. It was something like Avad Ketavra or something...”

“Avada Kedavra?” Asked a Headmaster, who had now visibly paled.

“Yes, that one. Well, You-Know-Who said something...something about how Harry was using ...using dark magic and that that you would be disappointed in him acting that way...then..then”

“Please go on” said a no longer twinkling Dumbledore

“You know who...offered Harry the opportunity to join him” At this point Neville swore he saw the Headmaster pale even more than before “Then Harry...he said something about how you were a fool and that it was an interesting proposition...”

“Then what Mr Longbottom?” Asked Dumbledore, now looking extremely tired and apperhensive.

“Harry said that You-know-who is a bastard and...and that he would not share the world, as he could just as easily take it for himself...then they duelled...and Harry killed him...” Finished Neville.

For a long time, Albus Dumbledore remained silent. His face had a pale, thoughtful and tired expression. Finally, he said

“I see...thank you for this information Mr Longbottom...now I suggest you rest...the end of school feast is tomorrow.” With those words, he walked out of the hospital wing, looking pensive.

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Harry approached the Great Hall just in time for the end of school feast. Just like in his first year, the hall was decorated in the banner of the snake house. Even though Harry’s improved performance meant more points for Gryffindor, it was still not enough to come into the lead. But Harry was confident that Dumbledore would make his last minute changes in this world as well.

Dumbledore rose, giving a speech to the students. Before long, he came to the matter of the house cup.

“As you all know, Hufflepuff is in fourth place with three-hundred and fifty two points, Ravenclaw is in third with four hundred and twenty six points, Gryffindor in second with four hundred and thirty three points, and Slytherin in first with four hundred and seventy two points. So Slytherin wins for another year...”

At this point, the Slytherin table erupted in cheers.

“Yes, well done Slytherin, but there are some recent events that we must take into account...some people’s actions must be rewarded...so I shall give some more points.”

Harry smirked as the smiles on the Slytherin’s faces froze and then disappeared in one giant wave.

“To Ronald Weasley, for the best chess game Hogwarts has seen for years...I award Gryffindor 50 points!”

The Gryffindor Table Roared so loud that the windows trembled.

Once the noise level had subsided, Dumbledore went on.

“To Hermione Granger, for her calm and logic in the face of difficult and dangerous situations...I award Gryffindor 50 points!

Once again, noise filled the great hall, as the joyous Gryffindor celebrated the fact that they had won 100 points.

“For Neville Longbottom” Started Dumbledore as the hall went silent again “for great bravery and courage in the face of evil...I award Gryffindor 60 points!”

The Great Hall exploded with so much noise, that even the ghosts had to flee.

“Finally...there are many types of people in this world...but for one young man who led his friends with wisdom through danger...one young man who looked evil in the eye and smiled... ..one young

man who has the power to use magic beyond the ability of many wizards...one young man who can pride himself in the fact that he managed to give one of the most impressive duels in the history of Hogwarts...for Harry Potter, I award Gryffindor 140 points!"

The windows of the great hall cracked by the explosion of noise that was created. Gryffindor had just gained 300 points! They were the winners of the house cup! 733 points! It was a record not matched ever since Ravenclaw won by 745 points in 1675! (According to Hermione at least, not that anyone really cared about that.)

"This means" shouted Dumbledore over the noise "that we need a change in decoration!" Clapping his hands twice, the Slytherin Banner was replaced with the Gryffindor Lion, and the hall became red-gold. Harry's eyes met Snape's, who until that point had been shaking McGonagall's hand with a fake smile. As Snape glared at him, Harry smirked and raised his glass to Snape, which infuriated the professor even further. Harry laughed. This end of the year was just as good as the first one he had. For the first time ever, he couldn't wait until he got back to the Dursleys. He had to get some revenge for all those years after all.

Just at that moment, he was approached by the Headmaster.

"Mr Potter, would you please come to my office after the feast? It is on the second floor, behind the Gargoyle Statue. Password is 'Chocolate Frogs'. I believe it is time we had a talk



## Chapter 4 – Repercussions

An apprehensive boy could be seen walking in the second floor corridor after the famous end of term feast that Hogwarts offers. Not that any of it showed in his face; indeed, if not for the lion crest on his robes, you might think he was a Slytherin.

After walking past the eerily silent corridors, he came to a halt before a statue of a gargoyle.

“Chocolate Frogs.”

The gargoyle immediately leapt aside, revealing a spiral stone staircase. The boy immediately went inside, and arriving at a polished oak door, he heard the entrance close behind him. He extended his hand for the brass gargoyle knocker when Dumbledore’s voice came through the door.

“Mr Potter! Please do come in.”

“Greetings Headmaster” said Harry as he walked through the door.

He eyed the large circular room, looking at the silver instruments he remembered breaking in his fifth year. He could clearly see the pale moon against the night sky through Dumbledore’s windows. As he approached the large desk, he looked at the portraits of the past headmasters/mistresses, most of which were looking at him curiously. Fawkes was at his usual golden perch, and was looking at Harry with a keen interest he had never seen before on the face of the phoenix.

“Please have a seat Mr Potter” said Dumbledore, indicating one of the plush chairs in front of him, “Would you perhaps care for a lemon drop?”

“Certainly professor” replied Harry, sitting down in a chair and accepting one of the offered lemon drops. “Thank you sir.”

“So Mr Potter, how has your first year at Hogwarts been?”

“Quite nice, though I did have a cultural shock at first. After all, I was raised by Muggles” *‘Something you are responsible for headmaster’* he added subconsciously.

“Most of the teachers report that you have been performing superbly in your studies lately...in fact, I am told that you are performing magic of a very advanced level.” said the old wizard, looking at Harry over his half-moon spectacles.

“Well...I have been putting in some extra effort since the beginning of the year...I find that much of the material is easy for me to understand, and I have done some extra study”

“I have also received some reports concerning your behaviour...and some reckless use of your magical ability.”

“I’m afraid I am not sure what you are talking about sir.”

“Professor Snape has made complaints about how you behave in his class...and professor McGonagall has told me that you were using advanced transfiguration against Mr Malfoy...is that correct?”

“Sir...professor Snape seems to carry some form of grudge against me since the beginning of the year...he will usually pick on me, ridicule me whenever I make a mistake and make lewd comments about me and my parents. I have done my best to be polite to him, but he maintains his bias against me, for reasons I do not know. I do not want to sound disrespectful professor, but I think that this questions the credibility of the complaints he has made against me.” said Harry *‘In other words, he is a slimy git’*

“I will admit that professor Snape may carry a bias against you Mr Potter, for I recall that he held quite a lot of dislike for your father...but I do seem to recall a day when he came to me laying specific charges against you for cheating and using words that not only were disrespectful, but also insulting.”

“With regards to the allegations of cheating sir, I decided to use a different brewing technique than the one given to us, because I believed that it would yield better results. On spotting me using a different method, professor Snape proceeded to make offensive

remarks about me and my intelligence, claiming I was using the wrong method. When the potion turned out to be satisfactory, he accused me of cheating. At that point sir, I will admit that I snapped and insulted him, but I simply could not take any more of his behavior. I believe that under these circumstances, my actions can be justified.” Harry explained. *‘I wonder if you would be as willing to defend that git if you knew that he ends up killing you’*

“I am willing to excuse you for that Mr Potter, but you still have to explain yourself with regards to bullying Mr Malfoy.”

“I wouldn’t call it bullying sir; he deliberately insulted my friends and my parents. At that point I had just endured the previous incident with professor Snape, and I admit that I let my emotions rule me. I had read about human transfiguration in a book on the previous day, and it was the first thing that came to my mind.” *‘That’s it, play the hotheaded Gryffindor, and he might just excuse you.’*

“Attempting Human transfiguration, especially when untrained, can have very dangerous consequences for the person involved.”

“I...I understand that professor, and I am very sorry...I will try not to lose control of my emotions like that again sir. I promise to be more careful from now on...It was an isolated incident, can you please just excuse me this once? I am really sorry.” *‘Just say yes...you have excused much worse things before.’*

“You need to understand Mr Potter, that with great power comes great responsibility. I understand you were provoked, but you need to understand that when you learn magic, you need to learn how to control yourself as well, or you will cause harm to the world around you.” said the elderly wizard, in a serious tone that tended to make most of his students squirm. Not that it affected Harry.

“Yes sir. I promise to go to extra lengths to control myself from now on”

*‘Come on! Just accept what I say and assume the best of me! It is what you did for Snape after all! And he tortured and killed!’*

"I certainly hope so Mr Potter." said Dumbledore leaning back on his high-backed chair. "Now, there is another matter I wish to discuss with you"

"Yes Sir?" *'So he was stalling until now...what does he want?'*

"I would like to talk about your confrontation with Quirrell when you and your friends went after the philosopher's stone."

"Sir? I thought we have already been over this."

"Indeed. From your account, after Mr Longbottom fell unconscious, you dueled Quirrell, trying to distract him with some hexes, but you were rather ineffective, is that correct?"

"Yes sir. I couldn't really do anything against him. He would block everything I sent towards him. He just stood there and laughed at me, saying how my pathetic spells could never defeat him. In fact, the only reason I am alive is because he toyed with me."

"And from what you told me Mr Potter, you then proceeded to banish Mr Longbottom's body on to Quirrell, who then burned as a result of the contact?"

"Yes sir. His hand got burnt when he tried to grab him the first time, so I thought that it would be my last hope."

"Yes...you performed quite bravely down there Mr Potter." Said the Headmaster, who then remained silent for a few moments. "However, we appear to have a small problem."

"Problem Sir?"

"Mr Longbottom claims that he woke up shortly after Quirrell put a curse on him. He claims that he witnessed the exchange between you, Quirrell and Voldemort's spirit. His account however is rather...different from yours." Said Dumbledore, looking sternly at the boy in front of him.

Harry froze. *'Damn it...he knows what I did! He knew I was lying all along...I need to create a cover, and fast.'* "Really professor?"

"Yes. I am particularly concerned that you allegedly used the dark arts down there Mr Potter...including the unforgivable killing curse."

Harry hung his head. "...I admit that I did use them sir...but it was the only way! He would have killed Neville and me! He was going to use the stone to resurrect Voldemort! I could let that happen."

"And you found it necessary to turn to the dark side to do that?"

"I am not a dark wizard sir! I just used that magic out of necessity! This is Voldemort we were talking about! If I had not used it, who knows how many lives would have been lost!"

"Could you not have achieved the same result with light magic?"

"Sir...magic is about intent. I may have used the dark arts, but I am different from a death eater, because I did not use it to harm others, but to protect my friends and the magical world! If I hadn't used the killing curse, neither Neville nor I would be alive at this point, and Voldemort would most likely have begun a new age of terror." *'Just buy it! You trusted other dark wizards!'*

"And how did you learn this magic Mr Potter? The dark arts are not taught in any lessons or covered in the books we have in the library."

"I..." *'Think fast you fool!'* "I read about some of the spells in some books that I aquired..."

"And are these books legal Mr Potter?"

"They were more like hand-written notes..."

"I am quite concerned about you reading manuscripts by dark wizards Mr Potter...it could easily lead you down the wrong path."

Harry felt a very gentle and subtle push against his barriers. Livid, he prepared to slam his shields to full power, but he thought about it a second time. It was too subtle. *'He knows I am an occlumens, he must be trying to get by unnoticed! I might just be able to use this "talk" to my advantage!'* Instead of stopping the attack, he fed false

memories to the Legilimency probe, showing genuine regret and innocence.

"I would never go dark sir! The followers of Voldemort killed my parents! I would never follow in their footsteps!...and...and...I found some of these spells written in an old potions book."

"Really?" asked professor Dumbledore.

'Now's my chance...' He thought whilst saying: "I found it in Sn..proffesor Snape's classroom, during a detention...it is *Advanced Potion-Making* by Libatius Borage...it had potions advice and some spells written in the margins...it was the old copy of a student...they only identified themselves as the Half-Blood Prince."

"Half-Blood Prince?" asked Dumbledore, looking thoughtful, and at the same time interested in the information.

"Sir...I think it belongs to Professor Snape."

"Are you sure Mr Potter?"

"Well...the handwriting is similar....and when I was looking through some old daily prophets in order to learn some things about this world...I saw a notice about Eileen Prince marrying a muggle named Tobias Snape...the name interested me so I looked at some later newspapers, and there was a notice that they gave birth to Severus Snape...so in a sense, he was a Half-Blood prince...and considering his potions expertise and the dates...I came to the conclusion that it is him."

"This information is certainly...interesting. Is that the only thing you used to learn the dark arts Mr Potter?"

"I...I did not know most of it was dark arts sir...and I read some books on dueling in the library...and some curses were mentioned there too...like the Avada Kedavra curse...I found that, like everything else, I learnt them easily. But I am not evil sir! Please believe me!" said Harry, looking genuinely sorry and intimidated.

Once again he felt a subtle push at his mind, and he fed it images that affirmed his story and made him look repentant and remorseful. Dumbledore then gained a compassionate expression and leant forward.

"I never said you were evil Harry...but, my boy, you have great potential, and I am afraid that by delving into the dark arts, you will eventually lose yourself in them...you can gain an addiction to the power that the dark side has to offer. I do not want to see you go down this path Harry...I am not here to punish you, I am here to help you." said the old man kindly.

*'Ahh...back to the grandfather act are we? Use of first name too....good thing I deflected part of the blame on Snape...I hope he gets fired...though I doubt it...good...this is working.'* "Thank you sir...if you think it is too dangerous, I will stop learning any dark arts. Please forgive me sir."

"Harry, I must ask of you to promise that you will cease all use and study of the dark arts, and that you try to control your emotions, so that you do not harm others with your power. I would also suggest that you take some advanced tutoring with some teachers, so your skills can be refined and you can learn advanced magicks but still control your power." Said the Headmaster, who now had his famous twinkle on and at full blast.

"I will stop learning these arts sir...and I will not use them unless I am faced with a wizard or dark creature that puts me and my friends at mortal peril...I promise not to harm anyone with my power...as for the tutoring...I would do it...so long as I am allowed to choose the instruction I will receive."

"That would be acceptable Harry. Now, have you been learning any other branches of magic?"

Harry felt another probe, this time much less delicate and more blunt attack his mind. He immediately raised weak shields, which the headmaster would be able to break if he pressed on. The probe withdrew.

"I have been studying occlumency sir, which you doubtlessly noticed when you tried to read my mind a moment ago. I am not that good at it, but it was good enough to hold of a spirit, even if it was Voldemort's."

I apologize for that Harry, but I wanted to see your shields for myself. Now, to your studies, what else have you learnt thus far?"

"I have been studying some charms and transfiguration, but I mainly focused on trying to make my spells non-verbal. It is not as difficult as they make it out in the books, I guess that most people find it hard because their minds are trained to channel energy by shouting the incantation and it is hard for them to adapt" Lied Harry quickly.

"That is quite an interesting theory Mr Potter" Said the Headmaster with his mildly annoying twinkle. "I have been looking into some of that stuff as well. Now, I believe we have one more matter to attend to. What do you know of a certain prophesy?"

"Ahh...that....well...I kinda snuck into Snape's office one day...to um...borrow certain ingredients...for which I am sorry sir..." started Harry

"It's quite alright Harry, I am certain they will not be missed" said Dumbledore

"Yes...um...while I was there I noticed a stone basin in one of the cupboards...it had these odd runes and symbols around it...I looked in it and it had some bright, whitish-silver stuff in it...when I touched it, it pulled me into something...First I saw some of Snape's years in Hogwarts...then, I...I saw you and some old lady at a bar...you were interviewing her for some position here...but while she was talking she suddenly started saying: The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...born to those who thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies. Then Snape was thrown out, and that is all I heard. I then left this memory thing by using some occulmency. I am sorry for looking into whatever that was sir."

"Don't worry about it Harry, you were merely being inquisitive. It is natural in a boy your age. What you saw was a Pensieve, a device



that collects memories. But why did you tell Voldemort that you were the one mentioned in it?"

"Well sir, when I was small I read a book on the muggle second world war that talked about how the allies used fake information to confuse the Nazi's...so I thought that if I made him think it was me...because I do fit the two descriptors...and if I made him thought that it predicted I would become some powerful ruler, it would lead to him acting on that information and making a mistake." said Harry

"Very interesting Harry...though I do not think it was the wisest thing to do, as you have made yourself a target in his eyes..."

"I don't care if I become a target!" said Harry with passion "His followers killed my family, and he was threatening my friend! If he ever comes back, he will put all of my friends at danger! If he comes after me, then it will distract him from committing harm to everyone else!"

"How noble of you Harry."

*'This is getting better by the minute...'* "Sir? The prophesy...what exactly is it about?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that Harry...and I must ask that you do not share this information with anyone else."

"Yes sir. Me and Neville are the two candidates for it, aren't we?"

"Yes, but I do not want you to put this burden on his shoulders Harry."

"He is the one isn't he? Because he is the boy-who-lived? Doesn't he have a right to know?" Asked Harry in a concerned voice.

"I will eventually tell him...but he needs to have a childhood...he is too young right now."

"If you think that is best sir...I will do as you ask."

“So Harry...I hope you are looking forward to the holidays. Plenty of opportunity to empty everything your brain from everything you have learnt.”

To be truthful, I would rather stay here sir.”

‘Really? Why?’

“My relatives...they...they hate me sir.” said Harry, sounding nervous.

“Hate is a strong word Harry...I am sure it is not that bad.”

“No sir...they...I lived in the cupboard under the stairs until I got my letter...they would lock me in for weeks whenever I did something they didn’t like...sometimes they would even hit me...that is why it was so easy to use the dark arts sir...” He said, making his eyes look wet.

“Now Harry, are you sure that is what is happening?” asked Dumbledore.

Harry felt once more the Headmaster’s subtle attempt to enter his mind. inwardly smirking. He fed it images of all the beatings he had received, all the times he was in the cupboard, all the times when he felt alone and desperate.

“Yes...Sir...I...They...I don’t think I can go there again this year...could I please stay here? They wouldn’t miss me...and...I fear that if I see them, I might be tempted to break the promise I gave you...”

“Now my boy...you cannot stay at Hogwarts...but if there are problems with your relatives, I am sure we could have someone go there and investigate.” now said the old man, looking kind and slightly remorseful.

*‘Aha! Feeling guilty for putting me there eh? So now you will fix this, so I do not become another Riddle...’* Thought Harry, whilst saying, with shining, grateful “You..you would really do that for me, sir? Thank you sir! Thank you!”

"In the meanwhile, I do believe that you could perhaps stay with your friends. I am sure the Grangers, Weasleys or Mrs Longbottom would be glad to look after you...if the situation with your family is as bad as you say, we could even get them as your guardians." he said, with his twinkle on full blast.

"Really sir? But...don't I have any other relatives? I believe my aunt mentioned I had a godfather? Someone named Black?"

Dumbledore's expression became pensive. "Ahh...Sirius Black is your godfather Harry...but I am afraid he was a traitor, working for Voldemort. He is in the Azkaban prison now."

"Really? What was he convicted for?"

"He betrayed the locations of your parents and killed many muggles and a wizard Harry."

"He is responsible for the deaths of my parents? That bastard...sorry sir. Emm...could I perhaps see a memory of the trial in one of these...pensieve things? Or the notes of the trial? I would feel better if I could see justice being done...it would put a part of my soul at piece."

He could have sworn the Headmaster fidgeted slightly. "Erm..There was no trial Harry...he was sent directly to prison."

"No trial? Then how do you know it was him? He could be innocent!"

"Everyone knew he was your parent's secret keeper Harry. Your parents were hidden under a charm that would not allow anyone to find them unless they were told the location by the secret keeper of the charm...and that was Black. He was the logical choice, the best friend of your Father."

"So who performed the charm?"

"It was only you, your family and Black present Harry...anyone else being there would violate the charm's secrecy."

“So if no-one was there...they could have chosen another secret keeper...it would make sense....Black was the obvious choice...so if they used someone else, the dark side would go after Black, and the real keeper would remain secret.”

“That is stretching it Harry...and it does not explain why he killed all the other people.”

“You said there was a wizard right? Maybe he was the keeper! Isn't there a way to question Black, to see if he is saying the truth?”

“There are ways Harry” Said Dumbledore “But a wizard of Black's power...he could overpower them...”

“But...could I talk to him? At least hear his side of the story?”

“I will see if I can organize that Harry...though it will be difficult.”

‘*Yeah! I did it!*’ “Thank you sir, for all of the things you have done for me, and for giving me a second chance.” said Harry, looking very grateful.

“It is nothing my Boy!’ answered the twinkling headmaster. “Now, I do believe it is growing rather late, and Minerva would have my neck if I kept you up all night.’ he added, chuckling.

oOo

A short while later, an exuberant raven haired boy run through the Halls of Hogwarts to the Gryffindor dorm. ‘*That hat had a point when it said I would do well in Slytherin*’ he thought, as he gave the password to the Fat Lady and crawled through the opening behind the painting.

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“Wake Up Harry! The're giving our exam results today!” said Neville's voice, while at the same time someone pulled open the drapes on Harry's bed, letting the sun shine on the boy.

“No...need...to lose sleep...over that.” mumbled Harry, closing his eyes and pretending to have fallen into deep sleep, although in reality he was keenly aware of his surroundings.

Good thing too, for two red-haired devils had decided that this would be a good moment to visit their little brother, and give their own kind of wake-up call. Two buckets of water appeared over two of the beds in the first year dormitory. A short while later, one drenched 11 year old redhead woke up with a howl and started yelling at his snickering brothers.

“Now now Ronniekinns. Why don’t you stay silent when you are woken up like ickle Harrykins over here? You don’t see him complaining do you? Right Harry?” Said Fred, whilst approaching the raven haired boy’s bed.

A few seconds later both twin’s skin had changed to a polka pink colour and their hair into an electric blue colour.

“ Top of the morning to ya Gred, Forge. I think that considering my parentage, you should know that I am not that easy to prank...and I am more than capable of retaliating.” Harry then turned to Ron and muttered a few incantations, drying him off.

“Now Ron, your brothers only wanted to help you out of the kindness of their hearts. So, how about we go to breakfast before it disappears, and before Hermione drives everyone else crazy with her constant talk about the results?” He said smirking, while walking into the bathrooms for his morning shower.

15 minutes later, another howl could be heard, as spiders started coming out of Ron’s now dry clothes.

“I’m gonna kill him!” said a red-faced and red-eared Ron, whilst shaking off all the spiders. Everyone else just laughed. “Honestly! He is becoming almost as bad as you two” He said, pointing at his twin brothers, who immediately assumed an innocent expression, which did not go very well with their new appearance.

“Shut up and go get dressed Ron.” said Neville, as he and Harry exited the first year dorms “We’re going to meet you at the Great Hall.”

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Neville and Harry were greeted at the great hall by a frantic Hermione, who by now had managed to make every Gryffindor avoid her, because she drove them crazy by constantly talking about the results.

“Oh Neville! Harry! They are going to give us the results today! How do you think you did? I mean, I studied hard, but I do not know if I answered correctly on part b of question 3 on paper 1 of the History of Magic exam...and I do not know if I transfigured my mouse properly for the Transfiguration exam...and in Char..”

“Don’t worry Hermione! I am sure you did fine! Honestly! You probably got 150 in every exam!” said Harry desperately, while Neville tried to cover his ears.

“How can you know that Harry!” now said Hemione shouting “I might have gotten something wrong and it could harm my average! Oh, I failed everything, I’m sure!” She wailed.

“Bloody hell Hermione! You’re the best in our year along with Harry! How could you possibly fail?” Said Ron, who had now gotten rid of the spiders and joined them.

Soon, one of the famous Ron-Hermione arguments began, so Neville and Harry just tuned them off and turned to their breakfast.

Soon, McGonagall came and posted the results on a large notice board. The area was soon flooded by students frantic to learn their results.

“Ouch...hey move it...okay...hey what did I tell you Hermione? See perfect in everything.” said Ron, looking at the board. “Harry, you came out first in the year mate! Wow, your grades are really high for everything...except History of Magic...you barely passed there”

“Well...even I cannot go through Binn’s lectures....Ron you did well too! So did you Neville...look at your Herbology score! Third in the year! And you did well in DADA too!”

“Hey...I hope that Goyle didn’t pass.” Said Ron, who was looking much happier now that he knew his grade “Oh no...he passed...well, you can’t have everything in life can you?”

Relieved to know about their grades, the 4 students left the great hall to enjoy their last few, stress-free day at the castle. Harry enjoyed these for the first time, as he no longer had the expectation of having to endure the Dursleys once more.

“Good Morning Mr Potter, Miss Granger, Mr Weasley, Mr Longbottom.” came an elderly and cheerful voice from behind them “Wonderful day today, isn’t it?”

“Good Morning Professor Dumbledore” said the children.

“I do believe that you received your exam results today? The four of you did quite well from what I understand. Especially you two Mr Potter and Miss Granger” Said the twinkling headmaster.

“Oh yes sir” Said a beaming Hermione “I was very anxious for the results, but I am very happy now.”

Harry simply smiled and remained silent, waiting for the headmaster to continue

“Now Harry, I have spoken to Mrs Longbottom and Mrs Weasley regarding the matter we talked about in my office yesterday. I do believe that they would be quite happy to have you stay there over the summer.”

“Really sir? Thank you!” said a beaming Harry.

“Oh, it was nothing my boy. Now, I do believe that you should stay with Augusta and Neville for the beginning of the summer, and then after your birthday, you can stay with the Weasley family for the rest of the summer. Molly would be delighted to have you.

*“Thank you sir for going to all this trouble for me” ‘Of course, the fact that this helps you keep an eye on me and encourages me to have closer ties with the light has nothing to do with it...oh, you are a sly one Dumbledore...but you always see the best in people...and that led to your death.’*

“Oh it is no trouble at all my boy! Now off you go! Enjoy your last few days at Hogwarts!” He said, walking away whistling a tune.

“You’re going to stay with us for the summer mate?” Said an excited Ron

“Yea, what about the Dursleys?” asked Neville.

“I talked to Dumbledore about my relatives last night...he said that it would be best if I didn’t return there. So he said that he would see if I could stay with you guys! And I can!”

“That’s great! We can even have our birthday parties together!” Said Neville “You guys are both invited! I hope you can come.” He added, turning to Ron and Hermione.

“If my parents let me, I’ll come. You live in a wizarding household right? Oh this will be so exciting!” said Hermione, beginning to wonder at the possibilities of seeing a household full of magic.

Ron chuckled. “We’ll be happy to have you mate! You’ll get to see the Weasley clan!”

The four went on happily talking about their vacation plans and Harry, for the first time, prepared for a summer where he wouldn’t have to face the Dursley’s or battle the dark forces.

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A crowd of exited children poured out of the Hogwarts express when it reached platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  . As families re-united, Harry, Neville and Hermione followed Ron to a large congregation of Red Heads.

“Ron! Oh...You’re back! How did you like your first year? Did you children have a nice time?” asked Molly Weasley.



“Yes Mrs Weasley. Thank you for the sweater and the sweets.” replied Harry.

“Oh, it was no problem. Albus told me that you would be staying with us for part of the summer.”

“I...I don't want to put you in any trouble Mrs Weasley...” began the boy.

“It is no trouble! The burrow is open to anyone who wishes to stay!” said the Weasley matron. “Oh, Augusta!” she called, spotting Neville's grandmother in the crowd.

“Hello Molly. I see you have found my grandson.”

The two witches settled into a conversation, while Harry and his friends went to talk with the rest of the redheads. As the other 3 got into a discussion with the brothers, Harry approached the youngest Weasley.

“Hello, you must be Ginny.”

“H..Hello” squeaked the little redhead, blushing.

“You'll be joining Hogwarts next year, aren't you?”

“Yes...I hope I'm in Gryffindor....” She stammered.

“Oh, if you really want to go somewhere, then the hat will put you there. Believe me, it kept on telling me that I would do well in Slytherin, but I was dead set against that. Just keep on asking it for Gryffindor, and it will put you there.”

“R...Really?”

“If it doesn't, then just tell it that I will have a talk with it involving a few thread-cutting hexes and a nice strong fire. After that, it won't dare put you anywhere else.”

Just then, the Weasley twins approached.

"Ahh, Gin-Gin, I see you have met our protégé, ickle Harrikins!"  
Started Fred

"Yes, we have very high expectations from this young fella!"

"He'll make us proud he will!"

"And when you join us next year, you can join him Ginny! You would like that, wouldn't you?"

"After all, you were looking entirely too red right now weren't you?"

Ginny's blush spread, and she now looked horrified

"Aww, dear brother, I think little Gin-Gin has developed a crush for Mr Potter over here."

"Alright guys, that's enough, leave her alone, or your appearance will take several weeks before it gets back to normal" said Harry, with his wand levelled at the twins.

"I think dear brother that our little Harrykins is being too protective of our little sister."

"Indeed. And I think he was a little too comfortable when he was talking to her just now"

"Yes, and is that a blush my dear eyes spot on him?"

"Harry! You mustn't let dear Gin-Gin here distract you from pranking!"

"Unless she is helping you with the pranks."

"We are putting a lot of faith in you two"

"Yes, you are the next generation of pranksters!"

Unfortunately for the twins and fortunately for the now blushing Harry and Ginny, their last comment was caught by Mrs Weasley.

"Fred and George Weasley! I sure hope you are not trying to corrupt your sister and poor Harry!" She started, quickly settling into giving a

lecture to the twins, who had adopted innocent expressions that fooled no-one.

“And you young man must be Harry Potter” came the voice of Mrs Longbottom. “My grandson speaks most highly of you.”

“Hello Mrs Longbottom” said Harry.

“So you will be staying with us for the summer? That is good. Neville needs to have some friends, he is such a lonely boy, nobody around for him to talk to. He is such a good boy though, just like his father.”

“Gran...” started Neville, whose ears had turned red

“Yes...well then, say goodbye to your friends boys, we had better be going.”

The two boys who were candidates for the prophecy quickly gave their goodbyes to the Weasleys and Hermione, and followed Mrs Longbottom through the gate of platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  .

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And Harry's off to the Longbottom estate! Hoped you liked that talk with Albus.

As always, your feedback is appreciated.

## Chapter 5 – Into the Vale

Longbottom manor comprised of several acres of land in Glamorgan Vale in Wales. The house itself was quite large, and showed that whilst the Longbottom family may not have the riches of the Malfoys, it was far from being destitute. It was a long, rectangular house, 2 stories high. It also had a large greenhouse next to the house, which explained some of Neville's prowess in Herbology.

After giving a tour of the house, Mrs Longbottom led Harry to the guest bedroom, in the south end of the Manor.

"This will be your room while you stay here Harry."

"Really? All this is mine?" said the boy with wonder in his voice whilst peering inside.

"Of course Harry"

"So this is actually my room? I get a room to myself?"

"Why Harry, you are acting as if you have never had a room of your own before!"

Harry fidgeted and looked at his shoes, reddening '*Come on...get the clue...*'

"Don't tell me.....you have had a room, haven't you?"

"Well...I got a room after I got my Hogwarts letter..."

"At 11? By Merlin boy, where did you sleep until then?"

Harry mumbled something.

"No need to be ashamed boy, speak up."

"The cupboard under the stairs." he said meekly.

"Why those awful muggles....I understand why Albus thought it would be best for you to come here my boy. Don't worry, we are much better than that." She said kindly, giving him a motherly hug. "Now, if

you need anything, just call the house elf. Her name is Trixie. Just call, and she will come. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to see my grandson. Dinner is at 7 am sharp." She said, leaving the room.

*'Good...she is softening up to me...now I need to figure a way to act in this house without Dumbledore knowing every single thing I do'* He focused his magic, sensing the wards on the house *'He has used ancient blood magic to protect Neville...interesting...and there are Anti-Apparition wards too...so I will need to take a rather long walk exploring the countryside some time soon...or sneak out at night. I need to get started on training my magical muscle.'*

The Dinner was quite good, though not up to Mrs Weasley's cooking standards. Not that Harry minded, for he wolfishly downed 2 servings. After all, he is a growing boy. After he finished, he retreated to his room, unpacking some more of his belongings and preparing for the next day.

Then, a knock sounded on his door.

"Come in" Said Harry, turning around and sitting on the bed.

"Hello Harry" said the pudgy faced boy with the lighting bolt scar.  
"Like the House"

"Yea...it's great. I can definitely see where your talents in Herbology come from" answered Harry, pointing towards the greenhouse, which could be seen reflecting the pale light of the moon outside the window.

"So...Harry"

"Yes Neville?"

"Umm...when...we...umm"

"When you want to know something, just ask straight away Neville."

"Well...remember the confrontation between you and Quirrell over the stone?"

"I do not think I would forget that...I almost died after all."

"Well...I watched most of it..."

"I know...Dumbledore told me as much."

"He...told you?"

"We had an interesting talk on the finer points of magic and my *esteemed* relatives"

"So...what exactly did you use down there?"

"You mean the spells classified as Dark Arts Neville?"

"Umm..."

"Dark is not necessarily evil Neville...the Dark Arts intend to hurt people...but in a situation like the one we faced down there, you either kill or you are killed...after all, if you think about it, touching you made him burn, yet you were not doing anything evil then were you?"

"I do not even know what I was doing at that point...it just sort of happened."

"I didn't think you were doing it consciously...as to what you did, I do have a theory....and this is just a theory mind you....but I do believe that your mother sacrificed herself out of love for you...and that created an innate protection against the dark arts..."

"Yes. Professor Dumbledore talked to me about that once...he said that is why You-Know-Who's curse rebounded."

"Yes...the protection would certainly work against Voldemort's curse...but it does not last forever. From what I have gathered about blood magic, it needs to be recharged, which is done so by living with here in Longbottom manor. It would be much stronger if you lived with someone of your mother's blood, but since your grandmother is related to you, the magic still recharges, albeit much slower...it is quite complicated really..."

“Wow. You certainly know a lot about it!”

“Hermione isn’t the only one that likes to read something extra” said Harry chuckling “and I admit I was quite curious as to why he burned when he touched you.”

“Erm...you talked about some prophesy down there...” started Neville

“Ahh...the fabled prophesy. I’m afraid you will have to ask our dear Headmaster about that, as he made me promise not to tell you about it. I do believe that you should know about it, but he likes to think the opposite.”

“Well...if Dumbledore thinks I shouldn’t know, then I guess I should forget about it.”

“Everybody makes mistakes Neville. Even a wizard as great as Dumbledore. Forget about it for now if you wish, but you should eventually talk to him about it. You should talk to him more often, he has a lot of wisdom that he is quite willing to give away.”

“Yeah. You are right...but you are also quite wise Harry...sometimes when you talk, you resemble him.”

“I am quite far from being at Dumbledore’s level Neville” said Harry “but I have talked with him, and I guess you absorb certain things. Now, I am certain that you are interested in some of the other things that went on when Moldywarts and I had our little tea party, right?”

“There is that thing about...occulmency?”

“Occulmency is the warding of the mind against external penetrations. Quite a useful skill actually, helps stop the effects of many dark creatures, even Veelas, and it stops direct attempts to infiltrate the mind, like Legilimancy, which is what Voldemort used.”

“Sure sounds useful. Why have we never learnt about all this mind magic at Hogwarts?”

“Even Occulmency is defensive in nature, it is a mind magic, and they are not generally liked in the world. Studying the defensive part of it

also means that you often study the offensive part, and people do not like having others snooping in their mind.”

“So you can read my mind right now?” asked a alarmed Neville.

“It is not exactly mind reading...and I am not at such an advanced level anyway...my mental shields were only able to keep Voldemort out because he was a spirit.

“Can you teach me? Not only the mind magic part, but all the other stuff you know...in fact, I think you Ron and Hermione too! We can form a sort of club or something...”

*‘This reminds me eerily of Dumbledore’s Army...’* “A club? What are we going to name it? Lets-Kick-Slytherin-Arse?” said Harry, snorting.

“You know that wouldn’t be a bad name...”

“Bit too much of a giveaway though...”

“Yes...but seriously, a club is a good idea, especially since we found out that the lovable dark lord is not quite as dead as the world would like to believe...we might have foiled his return this time, but he will try again...and we should be ready to stop him if he does.”

“Yes...well, I’ll go write to the others about that. Goodnight Harry.” said Neville, leaving Harry alone with his thoughts.

*‘Good...this way I can create a group that will fight against Voldemort, but will be under my command and not Dumbledore’s...’*

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Knockturn alley is usually a dark place. The pitch-black night sky made it even more so. The occasional light created fearsome shadows that would have created nightmares for many children. Yet it was a child that was moving fast through the streets at this ungodly hour.

Now you might ask, what is a child doing at this place at such a time? Well, for a start, Harry James Potter, whilst still in the body of a 12



year old, could easily fend off any sort of danger that the alley would present. And while most shops would be closed at midnight, do not forget that this is Knockturn alley, and midnight is when the 'best' wares are on sale.

And these are the kind of wares that the young Potter is after.

You see, there is one specific part of Knockturn alley called Cronk's Stand. It was a part which few people, and even fewer Ministry officials, dared to enter, for law had no place there. You could be mugged and killed within sight of many people, yet no-one would bat an eye-lash.

This made it the ideal place for the illegal trafficking of illegal items and creatures. And illegal is exactly what Harry was out to get. Though right now he sported a rather annoying headache.

*'Stupid runespoors...do those stupid three-headed snakes ever shut up? What is the point of having three heads, if all they do is argue? I understand now why parselmouths stay away from them.'*

He entered a dark shop and was immediately hit by the odor of several illegal and extremely rare potions ingredients.

"What are you doing here little boy?" Asked one of the guards in a malicious tone "This is no place for children. Now run along before somebody decides to use your corpse for a ritual"

Harry raised an eyebrow and answered only with a short jab of his wand "CRUCIO!"

The owner of the shop looked on in an odd mixture of fascination and horror as the guards screamed under the force of the boy's torture. Nobody moved to stop him. After all, business was commonly done this way here, though only the most powerful and rich customers actually used the unforgivables. It was sort of a sign of what the customer was after. After a few long seconds, the screams stopped.

"I assure you that I have every intention of doing business here, and whoever disagrees will find a very early grave" He then turned towards the owner and deposited some galleons in front of him "I am

perfectly capable of paying for some of your more...rare....ingredients Mr Suthenspore, now if you would please show me some of your wares?”

“Certainly Mr...?”

The boy just remained silent, and Suthenspore knew that he would have no answer. Instead, he led the way to the storage area in the back of the shop.

Harry eyed the ingredients with interest. *‘Re’em blood, Runespoor, Chimaera and Ashwinder eggs, Acromantula and Manticore venom, Demiguise hair, Dragon brains, Erumpent and Graphorn Horns, Lethifold hide, Even Nundu and Unicorn Blood! I don’t even want to know how they got the last ones...good thing I got all that money from Gringotts...I should get a seven lock trunk too...better not be seen with any of this...’*

A few hours and sever Crucio’s later, the young boy left Knockturn Alley having collected an array of ingredients, items and books that would have probably given him several lifetimes in Azkaban if he was found out. Which naturally meant that he took great steps to prevent that from happening.

*‘I need to see if I can get some access to the Black estate...with Sirius’s incarceration in Azkaban, I should rightfully be able to withdraw some funds...and since my Parent’s account is going to be running rather thin with my activities...I’m going to need it.’*

He proceeded to the bank which was opposite the entrance to Knockturn alley. Even though there was almost nobody around at this time at night, goblins were still around, never stopping their work. Harry proceeded to one of the Goblins that looked at least less occupied than the others.

“Hello Grapnol” He said, recognizing the name from his previous universe “I was wondering if I could speak to the accountants of the Black Estate?”

The Goblin was shocked that this boy he had never seen before knew his name. Yet he quickly composed himself. “And who might

you be to have any business with the Black Estate?" He asked, sneering.

"I am Harry James Potter, godson of Sirius Orion Black and, with the incarceration of the later in Azkaban, controlling heir of the Black Family Vaults"

The Goblin gaped. "Very well Mr Potter, please follow me." He said, leaving his desk and leading Harry through some winding tunnels to a large polished wooden office door with a sign in Gobbledegook saying Brandok: Black Estate.

"Harry James Potter, godson of Sirius Orion Black and appointed heir of the Black Family here to speak with the Black Estate Accountants" said the Goblin. The door opened and Grapnol rapidly made his way back to his desk.

"Greetings Mr Potter" Said an elderly Goblin. He was short and dark skinned, with a long nose that looked as if it had been smashed. It had a pointed beard and a red cap

"Greetings Brandok. May gold always flow in your coffers." said Harry in perfect Gobbledegook.

The goblin looked surprised. While some wizards spoke the language, it was very difficult to learn it, and not many bothered to try in the first place, for they considered Goblins inferior.

"I see you speak our language Mr Potter. That is very impressive in someone of your age. Now, what business do you have with the Black Estate?"

"Seeing as my Godfather appointed me as his heir before he was taken to Azkaban, I was wondering what access rights, if any, I have to the Black fortune"

"Normally, in your position as an heir, you are allowed to withdraw a certain amount of galleons a month. This amount is set by the ruling Black family Lord, which in this case would be your godfather. The allowance has remained unchanged for a long amount, and it stands at 100 galleons a month until age 11, and 200 galleons until age 17.

You then gain full access to the vaults for as long as the family Lord allows you to have it."

"And if I am correct, we can set up for that to be immediately transferred to my trust fund every month, just like the monthly allowance from the Potter Estate?"

"Certainly Mr Potter. From my knowledge, the current allowance from the Potter Estate is 50 galleons a month. If you would wish it, I could arrange for the transfer to be done right now."

"I would like that Brandok. Now, I would like to speak to you regarding the incarceration of my godfather, whose welfare is a primary concern for you, seeing as he is Lord Black. You see, I have reason to believe that he might be innocent of the crimes he has been accused of..."

A short while later, Harry James Potter left the wizarding bank, leaving behind a very thoughtful goblin.

*'If things go as I want them to, I won't have to wait at all for the old man to act...even if he did. I will have to face the stupid Ministry's bureaucracy...but they will eventually bend...if they don't, I'll just break him out.'*

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"Master Guest must wake up! Breakfast is to be served shortly! Mistress says that Master Guest should wake up now, or he will have no breakfast at all!"

Harry groaned, and looked around at the entirely too bright room. "Thank you Trixie" He said to the house-elf, stifling a yawn "I'll be there soon"

Once the house-elf disappeared, Harry grabbed a restorative potion from his bag. Once he felt able to get up without falling asleep where he stoop, he cast a few charms to make his belongings undetectable and went on to prepare for the day.

*'Good thing that this is a wizarding household...It would be harder to do all this magic if I was still with the Dursley's...just shows how*

*incompetent the ministry is...*" He thought as he sat down with Neville for breakfast. "Morning Neville" He said to the bleary eyed boy.

"Hello Harry" he answered weakly.

*'Never was much of a morning person that boy...something he'll need to fix if he wants to survive the war. Though he is only 12, so I guess some things can be excused.*

"Neville," said Mrs Longbottom entering the room "why don't you take Harry out on the grounds for today?"

"Yes Gran." said the boy "Can we go up to Cardiff?"

"Better stay away from the city. You can go up to Rhooose on the coast if you want, but in that case you must take Dan with you"

"Dan?" asked Harry

"Our dog; a Great Dane" clarified Neville "He is big and will keep any trouble away, but he'll never anyone unless they try to hurt me."

"He'll keep you boys safe. Now, you will probably be gone for the whole day, so Trixie has packed some lunch for you." Said Neville's grandmother, passing two large packets to the boys. "Make sure you are back before it gets dark!"

"Come on Harry! You can have some of my clothes." Said Neville, whose previous sleepiness seemed to have vanished as fast as his breakfast.

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Dan was indeed a Great Dane, and looked quite a bit like Fang, including the fact that deep at heart, he was a coward.

*'At least Neville knows where he is going...this dog could hardly harm a cat, and if a death eater or dark creature came along...well, I think it might be useful by running home and hiding, informing everyone we are in danger...' mused Harry, as they walked through the forests to come out to the coast.*

“Look Harry! That’s Ilfracombe over there!” Said Neville, pointing to an area on the land on the other side of the Bristol Channel “That is where the dragon swept down in 1932!”

“Are there still dragons around here?”

“Oh sure, we have the common Welsh Green that still nestles in the mountains up north of here, but they never come down...”

Harry stopped paying attention to Neville at that point, for he could hear voices nearby.

>>You idiot, why did you bring us here? I swear sometimes you are...>> said a voice

>>Quiet! I decide where we go, so now lets go west! I smell food!>> answered another

>>Food...lets dream about food>> added a third voice

>>This is not the time to dream you numbskull! We need to eat>> said the first voice.

>>So lets go eat then! Now be quiet or I’ll bite you>>

A 7-foot long orange coloured snake with three heads and a black binding appeared from the nearby bushes. Neville stopped whatever he was doing and took a step back. Dan whimpered and bolted towards home.

*‘Oh great...a runespore!’*

>>Humans>>

>>Food!>>

>>Attack you fool! What are you waiting for!>>

The snake heads continued bickering, whilst at the same time they were nearing closer to the two boys.

*'I'm going to regret this but...'* Thought Harry >>Do you mind not attacking us?>> he said.

>>The snakes froze. You speak?>>

>>Of course he speaks you fool! He just did!>>

>>Well, if he speaks, we must not attack them>>

>>Why?>>

>>Because he speaks!>>

>>Right...erm we'll be leaving now...>> said Harry

>>Go then speaker...>>

>>Why are you speaking to him?>>

>>Because I can>>

>>Idiots!>>

The snake heads continued to argue, whilst Harry grabbed the petrified Neville and left,

*'Seems like he didn't understand anything...which probably means that he did not get the parselmouth ability along with that scar...so how did I get it? Or did I have it all along?'*

Before they went far however, Neville broke from his hold and looked at him

"You...you're a parselmouth?"

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Previous Chapter:

Before they went far however, Neville broke from his hold and looked at him

“You...you’re a parselmouth?”

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## **Chapter 6 -- Failure of Blood**

“A what?” asked Harry

“A parselmouth...someone who speaks to snakes....you told the snakes not to attack.”

*‘Seems he did understand after all...well, guess sometimes the Old Man is right’*

“I thought they were magical snakes! I mean, how else could we hear them?”

“Well, if you are a parselmouth, of course you could understand them! Pretty stupid snakes too...what is the point of having three heads that argue all the time?”

“You could understand them?” asked Harry

Neville froze.

“Yes...but...I’m not a parselmouth! How could I do it?”

“Maybe you are? Why couldn’t you be?”

“But...only evil people can do that! Salazar Slytherin could do it! And so could You-know-who!” said Neville frantically.

“So what? What is so evil about speaking to snakes? People are probably afraid of it because they cannot understand it. Are you evil? Am I evil? I don’t think so.” said Harry.

“That still doesn’t explain how we can do it.”



“Who cares? Maybe it just comes randomly, like metamorphomaguses”

“Meta what?”

“People who can change their physical characteristics whenever they want to. They are rare too...perhaps its just one of those gifts...”

“Maybe...but how is it that none of us knew until now?”

“Have you ever tried speaking to a snake before?”

“No...have you?”

“I think I set a boa constrictor on my cousin once, but I didn’t know I was a wizard then...and I thought it was just accidental magic until now...”

“So we can speak a language no-one else can?”

“I don’t know...lets try speaking in it...”

“Erm...hello? Sshesslo?” said Neville, trying to imitate a snake “I don’t think this is working...how did you do it?”

“I just spoke to the snake, it came naturally...”

“What do you mean naturally?”

“Just pretend I am a snake or something, then try speaking to me normally”

“Okay...so I am speaking to you right now and I think you are a snake...” Somehow I get the impression that this is so stupid

“You did it!”

“I did?”

“Yea, if you concentrate, you can recognize that it is parseltongue...let me try” Right...so now concentrate on my words...you should hear a hissing

"I do!" This is easy once you get used to it...how can I speak a language without knowing?

Magic?

Hahaha very funny

But it is the truth!

Yea...you think the others will hate us for this?

They should accept it...they are our friends aren't they?

"If you say so." Responded Neville, turning around. "Its cool to speak in a language that no-one else can understand. Say, what exactly was that thing anyway? I've seen a three headed dog before, but never a three-headed snake."

"Its a Runespoor. Magical snake, native to Burkina Faso"

"This is not Burkina Faso... so what in the name of Merlin is it doing wandering on the British coast?"

*'You idiot! Why haven't you thought about that? You are supposed to analyze every combat situation!'* "It could have escaped from somewhere...but someone could have set it after us, so I think we should be going now..." He said, beginning to walk at a brisk pace towards the manor.

They had barely gone a mile when Harry grabbed Neville and through him to the ground. The next second, a purple light flashed over them, blasting a nearby tree to pieces.

"Ahh...it seems you darling children escaped my runespoor didn't you?" Asked a voice behind them.

Harry spun around to look at the figure and recognized it immediately. Bellatrix Lestrange, closely followed by Rodolphus and Rabastan Lestrange.

*'Not in Azkaban here eh? Just great!'* groaned Harry mentally.

“What a pity those blood wards of your have weakened Longbottom...your mother’s sacrifice will go to waste now...if you had a relative on your mother’s side, things might be different...but now..” she said, looking down at the boy “You know, we have been waiting for this moment for 11 years....taking the wards down slowly. Even the old fool hasn’t noticed what we have done here. With your absence over the school year, we had enough time to ensure that we could prepare a....welcome home party for you.”

Rabastan then stepped forward. “Now....you’ll be wondering, Longbottom, what exactly I want with you...well, to make it simple...we will make the dark lord returns...and we are going to need your blood...the very blood that carries your mother’s sacrifice, to do it...”

“I’ll never let you bring him back!” shouted Neville

“Your co-operation is, fortunately, not necessary.” Said the man imperiously

“I saw you master a month ago! And let me tell you, he was weak! A pitiful spirit!”

“CRUCIO” shouted Bellatrix, holding Neville under the spell for a few seconds. “You will not speak of the Dark Lord in that way. Not even death can defeat him, and the fact that he is still alive, even if without a body, proves it.”

Harry at that point decided he had enough, and started laughing.

“You think you know better boy?”

Harry looked straight into the eyes of the death eater “Voldemort is a coward, and he flees from death like a little child”

“You dare speak his name you insolent fool? You dare put his name on you half-blood lips child?” she shouted.

“Did you know that Moldyvoldy is a half-blood too? Yeah, old Tom Marvolo Riddle is his real name...has he been feeding you bullshit that he is pure-blood?” spat Harry

“CRUCIO!” she shouted.

Harry tried apparating, but to his dismay, there were anti-apparition wards keeping him in place. The curse hit him head-on, and he bit his tongue so that he would not scream. Blood filled his mouth, but despite the immense pain, he did not give her the satisfaction of his scream.

“Is that the best you’ve got?” he said once it was over.

“You want more boy?” she spat “because I’ll gladly give it to you!”

Neville, prepare to run to the manor hissed Harry, with the death eaters watching in horrified confusion.

but...

Just do it you idiot! he said. Then he turned towards Bellatrix. “I think that perhaps I should teach you how it is truly done...CRUCIO!” he said, channeling as much of his magic into the curse as possible. The death eater started screaming and writhing on the ground, whilst blood came out of her mouth and eyes. Neville started running, and that snapped the other two death eaters out of their daze.

“Get him you fool!” shouted Rodolphus, casting a nasty looking disemboweling curse at Harry.

Rabastan made to follow Neville, but he fell to the ground as a blasting curse from Harry passed over his head and smashed a nearby tree into pieces

“Leaving so soon?” asked Harry, looking confident and not betraying any of his inner panic. “Just when the fun began.”

A duel immediately began, as the furious death eaters began pummeling Harry with spells. The boy barely had enough time to dodge and block, only managing a few counterattacks in between.

Bellatrix’s blood-stained face had a maniac gleam to it as she cast crucio after crucio, laughing when the boy dodged them.

*'Damn...I am never going to survive unless I act fast...'* thought Harry as he dodged another lethal curse coming from the inner-circle death eaters. He then spotted a large tree that had almost been uprooted nearby. *'That ought to do it...I hope.'* "ACCIO" he shouted, pointing at the tree. It started moving as if a giant was nearby, and slammed with immense force on the ground near Harry, forcing Bellatrix to fall on her feet to avoid it.

"AVADA KEDAVRA!" shouted Harry, pointing at the prone form of the female death eater. He watched with glee as the green light struck her body, he looked at the flash of recognition, fear and acceptance in her eyes as the unforgivable stuck her. He was overcome by a feeling of euphoria as he felt his dark magic sucking the soul from her body. The feeling was quickly replaced with pain as he felt the bone in his arm being smashed into thousands of pieces from Rabastan's curse.

He barely blocked the next few curses, as he concentrated on numbing the pain in his arm. Then, he looked up and saw one of the death eaters near him.

Rodolphus stepped towards him with a dangerous glint in his eye. "You are too much trouble boy...AVADA..."

He never managed to finish the incantation, as a red stunning spell hit his back and sent him to the ground, unconscious. Five more red lights raced towards Rabastan, who managed to block the first four, but was knocked out by the last one.

Harry looked at the uniforms of the Aurors that congregated the area. He felt someone helping him up.

"You alright?" asked one of the wizards.

"My left arm is smashed, but otherwise I am fine sir." he answered.

"Hey, these are the Lestranges!" shouted one of the aurors "and this one is dead!" he added, pointing at Bellatrix's corpse.

"What happened?" asked one of the aurors.

"They ambushed us...I distracted them so Neville could get help." said Harry.

"You...distracted them boy?" asked one of the aurors, not believing that a 12 year old could do such a thing.

"More like dueled them..." he answered, wincing from the pain in his arm.

The auror just let out a snort, and went over to tell to one of his colleagues to take down the anti-apparition wards.

"How did she die?" asked a black-skinned auror that Harry recognized as Kingsley Shacklebolt.

"Avada Kedavra" answered Harry.

"Who cast it?"

"I did." said the boy, looking straight into the eyes of the wizard, whose eyes widened in surprise. He made to say something, but at that moment, the figure of Albus Dumbledore appeared at the area.

"Ahh...Harry. I think it would be best if you came with me now. Don't worry, Neville is safe at Hogwarts." said the old wizard.

"But sir, he is a witness! We need to que..." tried to interrupt one of the aurors.

"That will not be necessary" said Dumbledore "he needs to heal, he can be questioned later."

"But he has cast an unforgiv..."

"I said it is not necessary. Now come on Harry."

The wizard grabbed Harry's arm, and the boy soon felt the squeezing feeling he had come to associate with apparition. The feeling stopped and he saw Hogwarts castle in the distance.

"Would you like for me to conjure you a stretcher Harry?" asked the old wizard.

“No sir, it’s only my arm, I can walk”

It was not long before Harry was, once again, under the attentions of Madam Pomfrey.

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Harry woke up the next morning to the sight of Neville’s grinning face. He reached for his glasses on the nearby desk and put them on.

“You’ve made front page news!” said the boy excitedly, thrusting a newspaper at his lap.

Last Death Eaters Captured!

Yesterday afternoon, a floo-call came for Aurors to move to the Longbottom estate. The cause was an apparent attack by former Death-Eaters and Dark Wizards, Bellatrix, Rodolphus and Rasbatan Lestrage. Whilst details are vague, authorities claim that the dark wizards were held off until the Aurors arrived by Harry James Potter, who will enter his second year at Hogwarts this coming September. Bellatrix Lestrage is reported to have been killed whilst dueling Mr Potter. The Lestrages are reported to have been inner-circle death eaters under the command of You-Know-Who, and were the last of the death eaters to remain at large. Crimes committed by the Lestrage family include....

Harry put the newspaper down.

“Glad to see they aren’t mentioning exactly what I used in that duel” he said.

“I heard some of the aurors saying that you used the killing curse on Lestrage?” asked Neville.

“Yea...it was a kill or be killed situation, and I don’t really think they will condemn me for killing a mass murderer...how did they get there anyway?”

“I reached home and used the floo to get them...they came in through that, and then run off towards the grounds where you were fighting.”

“Good thing too, they came just in time. So what is going to happen now that the blood wards are down?”

“I don’t know...I think they are going to cast some other wards, and the ministry has offered some auror protection...but Dumbledore said that it wouldn’t be necessary...anyway, me and Gran are staying in Hogwarts for the summer until everything is sorted out. You are too, at least, until you go to the Weasleys.”

“Cool...so, any idea when I will get out of here?”

“I think you should be able to get up now, but you know Pomfrey....”

“Then best I leave before she notices eh?” He asked, getting up and sneaking into one of the changing rooms.

“Right...so, have you had any breakfast yet?” Harry asked when he came out

“No...I just woke up half an hour ago...Madam Pomfrey handed me the newspaper... I’m starving now.”

“Good...follow me then, I know how to get into the kitchens. I am sure that the house elves there will give us something to eat.”

“There are house-elves at Hogwarts?”

“Of course! How did you think all the food was cooked and all the corridors were cleaned?”

“Magic?”

“Well...house elf magic certainly. Now lets go.”

And with those words, the two boys scurried out the hospital wing, before Madam Pomfrey could notice they were up.

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“Those house elves certainly like serving people!” said a rather full Neville as the two boys left the kitchens via a painting of a bowl of fruit.



“They are rather useful when you sneak out at night and you’re hungry eh?”

“And with our invisibility cloaks...a late night snack is easy to get...so what should we do now?”

“We could get started on that group thing you talked about...”

“Yea...I still haven’t received any replies from the others about that...but anyway, where do we start?” said Neville

“How about a name?”

“Mmm...Lion Pride?”

“Too Gryffindor centred...how about Potter’s Infernal Legion of Ultimate Doom?”

“Haha...how about...Wizarding Army of Five People?” said Neville laughing

“We could add more people later on...”

“Yea...so we could have it named Wizarding Army of Five People, More May be Added Later!”

“Okay...seriously now Neville.”

“Erm..Guild of the Fearless? Defence Association?”

“How about a simple name?”

“Simple? Okay...Magic Hand? Doomspell? or, if you want, simply the company!” said Neville.

“We’ll see...we should decide on a name all together.”

“So you’re going to teach us right?”

“And help you teach yourselves” added Harry. “We can be a secret group, we can have power...”

“We can tort..I mean prank malfoy” added Neville

“And Crabby and Goyly...”

“And Snape”

“and kick Mrs Norris”

“We could use the help of the twins you know...” said Neville.

“You know...this reminds me of the group that my dad had...they called themselves the Marauders...”

“There you have a good name...we can pick something similar!”

“We need a place to meet though...I think I know one...the elves call it the come and go room...or the room of requirement...it is on the seventh floor, opposite the painting of Barnabas the Barmy. It is really a cool room, it will give you everything you need. It changes you see, by magic. So if you need a training room, it gives you a training room. If you need somewhere to hide, it will give you somewhere to hide...”

“Damn...that’s a good room. How come I’ve never heard of it?”

“It only appears when you need it...you have to walk in the corridor three times thinking of what you need for the door to come up...come on, I’ll show you.

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## Chapter 7 – Birthdays and the Burrow

The time Harry passed at Hogwarts over the summer was one of the best times in his life, as he didn't have to worry about someone trying to kill him or his loving relatives trying to starve him.

Dumbledore had naturally been very stern about Harry's use of dark magic, but an act of apology, some pretence of fear for Neville's life, and a mention of the fact that Bellatrix had used the cruciatus on both boys was enough to keep him away, for now at least.

Dumbledore couldn't leave his precious boy who lived in an unsafe place, so, for over a month, Longbottom Manor was the site of extensive warding. As a final measure, the Fidelius charm was cast on the house, with Dumbledore himself as secret keeper.

Meanwhile, Neville and Harry explored most of the grounds, finding several secret passages that even the twins didn't know about. With all the excitement, it was not long before the end of July, and the birthdays for the two boys, arrived.

Since they were in Hogwarts, it was decided that they could invite everyone to the castle for the Birthday celebrations. So, as July 30 and Neville's birthday came along, the Weasley's, the Granger's and the rest of the Longbottom Family arrived at Hogwarts.

Neville and Harry woke up, and then went down to the Gryffindor common room, which was decorated and even had a banner saying "Happy Birthday" in flashing red letters.

Said flashing letters gave a certain Raven Haired boy a slight headache.

*'Ugh...couldn't these idiots pick something less bright? It looks like we are in the middle of a fire storm...'*

"Surprise!" Shouted a number of cheerful voices as Neville was assaulted by a number of hugs, pats, handshakes and Birthday wishings and an attempt at rib-breaking by Mrs Weasley. Harry's friends came over to greet him.

"Hello mate!" Said a cheerful Ron, with Hermione on toe "I see you were busy over the summer! Battling Death Eaters! Wow!"

"Well, what can I do, I seem to have an unhealthy hobby of getting in the way of dark wizards. Unhealthy for them though, not for me."

Hermione and Ron demanded all the details about the death eater battle, and Harry gave them a carefully edited version, which omitted certain facts of little interest, such as that he and Neville were parselmouths, and that he had used dark magic. Though he had to tell them about using the killing curse, and he watched their faces cycle through awe, respect and a little fear.

"Wow mate...you did them good...you would be a great Auror" said Ron

"Seriously Harry...I hope you are not thinking of going into dangerous situations like that...you could get killed" Said Hermione.

"Well, it is not so much that Harry is going into danger, its more like danger has a nasty habit of finding him...and us" Said Neville, who had managed to escape the attentions of the Weasley matriarch and had gone over to the group.

"And it is not like I want it to happen Hermione" added Harry "in fact, if the Aurors had arrived a few seconds later, I would be dead...Rodolphus was over me, halfway through his curse when they stunned him." He said, causing a small shiver go through the group that fell into an awkward silence.

"So, what is this about a study group that you owed us about" asked an exited Hermione, trying to change the subject.

"Study group?" said Ron, paling as if he was in a nightmare that he desperately wanted to wake up from "what study group?"

"It's not a study group Ron" said Harry, almost chuckling with mirth "It is a group where we practice things like duelling and defence, so we can kick the arse of the trouble that seems to be attracted to us...and that includes the Slytherins...and we will generally have fun...I have a

feeling that this year we might have as much trouble as we had last year...”

Ron’s face brightened up with glee at the mention of getting one over the Slytherins, but Hermione furrowed her brow and scowled. “I hope you are not thinking of picking any fights Harry.” She said in a stern voice.

“What? Me? I wouldn’t pick any fights” he answered, with his fingers crossed behind his back. “But as you very well know, some Slytherins” at this point Neville made a cough that sounded oddly like “Malfoy” “have the habit of picking fights with us...and if we bite back, they will learn to...adjust their behaviour.”

“Fine...but I will not tolerate you using this club as an excuse to break any more rules!”

“Hermione...between us, we have already broken every rule in the book!” said Ron, rolling his eyes.

She seemed unable to respond for a few moments, until she finally said. “We had a reason to! And imagine what you would have done if I was not there! You could have been expelled!”

“We still won the house cup...and with a record amount of points too” Reminded Harry.

“That was only because of what we did with the stone!” She said, almost shrieking.

“Fine...we won’t be doing anything bad...okay?” said Harry *‘Though that does not mean that I cannot unleash my marauder skills...hehehe’*

“So, what are we going to name our club?” asked Neville, trying to get back on the subject

“Advanced Study Group?” offered Hermione

“Griffin’s Chosen” shouted Ron

“How about we become the Shades?” asked Harry “you know, we can work in secret...maybe even put on a few pranks...” he added with a smirk.

“We are NOT going to be pulling any pranks!” said Hermione, looking livid and stamping her foot on the ground.

“Okay...but”

“NO” she insisted.

“Fine...Shades it is then” said Neville

“Yea...Shades is fine” added Ron “now lets eat!” he said, moving to the pile of sweets nearby, followed by a chuckling Neville.

“You aren’t really going to be pranking anyone, are you Harry?” asked Hermione

“Maybe once in a while, to lift school spirits.”

“But if you get caught, they’ll deduct points! Remember how it was last year when we lost 150 points? No-one would talk to us!”

“Nothing will happen as long as we don’t get caught M..Hermione.”

“But you can’t go around breaking rules!”

“The only rule is ‘Don’t get caught’. Anyway, don’t worry, if you don’t want yourself to be involved, you don’t have to help us.”

“But I cannot allow...”

“Oh come on Hermione...it’s not like we are going to kill anyone...and besides...my dad led a group of pranksters. And he ended up Head Boy!”

“But...”

“Fred and George get away with it...admit it, their pranks help people feel better...it adds a different flavour to the school year.”

“Oh alright...but nothing dangerous okay?” she said with a resigned sigh.

“Great!” said Harry sporting a wide smile. “Now let’s go and stop Ron before he eats all our food!”

The party was soon in full swing, with Neville opening his presents and the house-elves preparing a genuinely fantastic meal for the guests, which took place in the common room, specially modified for the occasion. Harry spent much of the meal talking with Neville’s great uncle Algie about the inefficiency of the ministry of magic.

After the meal, everyone drifted into separate groups and began hushed conversations. Harry noticed a redheaded figure looking around the common room with excitement, and he went over to it.

“Hello Ginny.” he said softly

The girl jumped slightly and turned around to face him. “H..Hello” she stammered, going slightly pink in the cheeks.

“So, how is your first impression of Hogwarts? Most first years see it for the first time on a journey across the lake, but it seems that you managed to sneak a preview!”

“It..It’s nice...I can’t wait until I get here!” She said, in a mixture of embarrassment and excitement.

“Have you seen the moving staircases yet?” asked Harry

“Yes!...They were exciting...but I am sure that they would be very annoying when you tried to get to class and they switched midway...”

“Ahh...Hogwarts can be quite a maze in your first year...which can result in you being late many times....say, how about I give you a tour while you are here? I can show you passageways that very few people know about...”

“Really? Now?” she said, with the excitement evident in her eyes “I don’t want to be a burden...”

“Nonsense! It’s be fun!” He said, grabbing her arm and pulling her to the common room entrance.

A few hours later, Harry had given her a grand tour of the castle and the secret passageways, along with many stories of their first year as well various stories about the marauders that he remembered people telling him. They went through each floor, and Ginny soon knew how to navigate through the castle, though she was still far from Harry, who knew it as if he had lived there all his life.

Initially she was hesitant to talk and simply followed Harry silent, but soon she loosened up as she heard the stories, and specifically those about her brother. She soon began offering useful titbits of information about Ron, the twins and the rest of the Weasley Clan.

*‘It’s nice to see her opening up to me...then I guess, not having the imposing title of boy-who-lived does help...’*

“So, what do you think about the twin’s proposition for us to become their protégés?” asked Harry as they were passing past the statue of Lachlan the Lanky, by the stairs leading from the sixth floor to the seventh.

“I don’t know if mum would be too keen on me following their footsteps...though I wouldn’t mind planning a few pranks, especially if you were...with...me” she said, blushing as the last part came out.

“Yea...I do not think we will be another set of twins, but we could always have some fun eh? Especially against Mafloy, I told you how much of a git he is. And anyways, my father got good grades as a marauder...it’s not that hard to learn and use your learning in a...creative way.”

“I...I suppose so. Please don’t tell mum though, she’ll bit my head off...and if she does, you mister will be getting a first hand demonstration of my bat bogey hex!”

“Don’t worry about your studies too much...we could always help you...at least, me and Hermione can, because I don’t think your brother would be an ideal teacher...speaking of which, you could join



our group! We're calling ourselves the Shades...we're going to be doing some fun magic! Cool Hexes, Duelling and naturally pranks!"

"You will help me? Really? And you want me to join you?" she asked, biting her lower lip.

"Sure...though I would advise you don't give in to Hermione too much, or she will have you studying day and night!"

"Thank you" she said, her eyes misty with happiness. "But Ron...I am not sure whether he would like me coming along..."

"I expect you will be quite an active member Ginny...and if Ron disagrees, you can give him a bat-bogey...or he can be the subject of our first prank!" Harry said, winking as they stopped once again in front of the Fat Lady "Birthday" he said to the portrait, and it accepted the password, opening to let them in.

"Thanks!" said Ginny, very excited. She jumped at him and gave him a firm hug, and then she went through the entrance with a blush reaching up to her pink ears. Harry just chuckled and followed her inside.

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Dinner was, as expected, nothing short of excellent. Varieties of Roast meat along with gravy and Yorkshire Pudding, Pie and Mash, Jellied eels as well as a Lancashire Hotpot. Such effort had been put into this dinner, that Harry could swear that it almost touched the mythical standards of Mrs Weasley's cooking.

After the meal, Harry was approached by Ron. "Say Harry, where did you and Ginny go of to for the evening?"

"I gave her a tour of the castle and the passages Ron" said Harry "It wouldn't do for the latest member of the Shades to have difficulty getting around would it?"

"Newest...you added her into our group? We do not need a tag-along Harr.."

“Your sister is not a tag along Ron. She is a very intelligent, pretty and fiery young lady who is standing right behind you and will hit you if you do not keep your mouth shut.” Said Harry.

Ron paled slightly and turned around to face Ginny, who had blushed slightly at Harry’s words but was nevertheless looking at Ron a scary glare with her hands on her hips. “Why shouldn’t I be a part of the group brother dear?” she asked.

“Ginny...you...you’re too young....”

“Too young?” she shouted “were you too young when you went up against that troll? Or went after the stone?”

“But you are not good enough...”

“I can be as good as anyone Ron! And with Harry’s help and teaching, I bet I’ll soon be better than most people in my year...even better than you!” she said, jamming her finger into Ron’s chest as she said the last part.

“She is right Ron” said Hermione, who had listened in to the argument amongst the siblings “she would be very good if we helped her.”

“But...I can’t have you rushing into danger with us...” offered Ron meekly.

“Would you rather I rush into it on my own?” she offered “At least, if you teach me, I stand a better chance!”

“Not to mention, she will be able to give any annoying Slytherins what they deserve if they come to close” added Harry.

Ron looked between all of them, his face betraying agreement but also too much pride and anger to back down. In a huff, he marched up the stair to the dormitories.

Shaking his head, Harry said “He will probably be better tomorrow” and walked over to the fireplace to sit on one of the chairs near it.

Soon, late night strolled in, and the remaining guests used the Gryffindor first and Second year dorms to stay for the night. Tomorrow would Harry's first birthday party in this world, and also the day he and Neville would finally depart from their stay at Hogwarts and go to the Burrow and Longbottom Manor respectively.

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Ron was slightly better the next day, though he was still slightly cool towards his younger and only sister. Nevertheless, his behaviour towards Harry was closer to normal.

Once again, the common had been decorated, this time for Harry's birthday. This time, the celebrations began with a large gathering in the morning around an equally large birthday cake filled with candles.

Harry, as tradition demanded, moved to the cake to blow out the candles, but at that moment all Hell broke loose.

And Hell breaking loose means that the Weasley Twins decided to take the spotlight. This naturally involved wishing Harry a very happy twelfth birthday by pushing him into the cake.

Harry's face was filled with pastry as he tried to get out of the now ruined cake. He glared at the twins, who now sported two wide cheshire cat smiles.

"Happy Birthday dear Prongs Jr." said Fred.

"I see that you really dove into that cake!" added George.

"Gred! Forge! How nice to see you!" said Harry, as if he was seeing them for the first time. "Enjoying the party? Because I think you need some more CAKE!" he said, grabbing as much of the pastry as he could and throwing it directly at their grinning faces.

It was not long before the birthday party evolved into a full-fledged food fight, which was eventually stopped by a screaming Mrs Weasley.

“Sorry Harry dear.” She said once everything had calmed down and the twins had made a hasty and wise disappearance. “I didn’t think that they would ruin your birthday...”

“Oh don’t worry Mrs Weasley. It was the best birthday I ever had! The Dursleys were never interested in it...this is the first time I actually had a party...and a family to celebrate it with....”

He could have sworn that he saw Mrs Weasley’s eyes well up with tears, and he was soon engulfed in a bone breaking hug.

Despite the now ruined cake, the celebrations for Harry’s Birthday were soon well underway, and for the first time in this world he received presents from people that truly loved him. *‘Being a child sure has its perks’*

After lunch, the Weasley Twins decided to throw an honorary Quidditch match with Harry, Ron, themselves and Neville. They were getting ready to split everyone up into teams when Harry stepped in.

“Hey, why don’t you let Ginny play?” he asked

“Oh come on Harry” Said George “I’m sure Ginny doesn’t want to play...and besides...she’s a girl...she can’t play.” Said Fred

“Hmmm...should I pass that comment onto Alicia, Katie and Angelina? I think they would be quite pleased to hex you for it. Give her a chance. I’ll take her on my team. Since we are an odd number, she will balance out anyway.” He said in a tone that clearly showed he had made up his mind on the matter. The elder Weasley brothers tried to argue with him, but they eventually accepted her in.

Harry, Ron and Ginny joined in one team and it was not long before they shattered the opposition. Between Harry’s years of experience and training on a broom and Ginny’s unexpected (for her brothers) talents, the opposing team soon found itself unable to properly defend its goalposts. Truth to be told, the twins put up quite a battle, and demonstrated excellent ability as chasers. Their co-ordination was so good that it was as if they could communicate in their heads. But even that wasn’t enough to save them from an eventual defeat.

After the match, Ginny fell behind to talk with Harry.

"Thank you for letting me play Harry" she said timidly.

"Ahh...my dear, I have a duty to help natural Quidditch talent such as yours shine through!"

"How did you know..." she began, looking at him in the eyes with apprehension

"That you have the classic Weasley talent at the sport and that you are so determined that you have been sneaking into your family's broomshed and borrowing the brooms of your brothers to fly since you were six?"

She just stared at him with her bright brown eyes, surprise and puzzlement evidently written on her face.

"There is a certain branch of magic that deals with the mind." began Harry "That part includes an art called Legilimency. Some people would call it mind reading...though that would not even begin to describe it...but I can see your thoughts."

"You have been reading my mind?" she asked, her face now a mixture of slight fear, embarrassment and anger.

"The mind cannot be read...but that is close to the truth yes. It was evident that you were thinking about your escapades when you were looking at me." He said. "But don't worry, I don't go around reading minds on purpose, I just did it to surprise you" he added quickly, seeing her Weasley temper surfacing.

"You better not go around reading my mind Potter!" she growled in a cat-like manner. "or you will have a first hand experience of what I can do!"

"Don't worry Ginny!" he said consolingly "I can teach you how to counter it with occulmency, the defence of the mind."

"Really? You'd do that?"

"It will be hard of course...don't expect to pick it up immediately...but it will be very useful, considering Snivell....I mean, professor Snape tends to use legilimency on the students...that is how he has managed to avoid so many of the twin's pranks."

"Hmmf....okay....but if you use that stuff on me again..."

"I understand fair lady. I shall never invade the sanctity of your beautiful mind again" said Harry making a mock bow. Ginny just blushed and giggled as they went the rest of the way to the castle.

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When the celebrations were over, Harry kindly said goodbye to both Hermione and Neville, who was now returning to his warded manor, but without Harry's company.

"Come on Harry! Are you packed yet?" hollered an impatient Ron from the common room as the evening, and the time for the young Potter to leave for the Burrow, came along.

"Keep your pants on, I'm coming." Said Harry, who was taking extra precautions to pack some of the more...volatile potions that he had brewed during his stay. *'After all, I didn't go through all that trouble to make basilisk anti-venom only to have it ruined because Ron is impatient.'*

He cast several charms on his seven-lock trunk to keep prying eyes away and to ensure that the contents were safe.

"So, lets get going shall we?" he asked, walking down the dormitory stairs carrying the large trunk, with the aid of a powerful feather-weight charm.

"About time mate..."said Ron, getting up from the couch where he had thrown himself. "I thought I was going to go mad with all the chatterbox talking about you all the time."

"Chatterbox?" asked Harry, amused.

“Ginny. She has been talking about you since she met you in the station, and after the match today, she has been talking about you non-stop! I told her to go to Mum, I just couldn’t bloody take it anymore!”

“Ron! Language!” said the stern voice of Mrs Weasley, who had appeared at the common room entrance. “Are you ready Harry dear?” she asked, eyeing his trunk “Good. Now come on, we will be using floo, and the Headmaster can’t keep it open for too long.” She said when he nodded.

Harry and Ron followed her down the series of stairways onto McGonagall’s office on the first floor. Most of the Weasley’s were already waiting by the roaring fireplace.

“About time you joined us Mr Potter” said the sneering voice of professor Snape, who had come to oversee the guests leaving. Harry did not respond to his taunts.

“Now Harry, have you ever travelled by floo-powder before?” asked Mr Weasley.

“No, but I know how it works.”

“Good. Just chuck the floo-powder into the fire and shout ‘The Burrow!’ then. Here, I’ll go first.” With those words he threw the powder onto the fires and jumped into them once they turned green, shouting his destination.

Soon, the rest of the Weasley Family followed and finally Harry went through the fire, only to find himself landing on the rug on the other side.

*‘Ugh...and just when I thought I had gotten rid of the tendency to fall when travelling like this...now I will have to get my body to learn it all over again.’* He thought as he extricated himself from the floor, ignoring the chuckles around him.

He looked around at the homely feel of the Burrow made a wave of happiness rise within him. Though unfortunately for him, that wave was accompanied by memories of its destruction. *‘Not this time*

*around.'* He thought with fervour. *'This time, snakeface will get his arse kicked...and this corrupt world will see who Harry Potter truly is.'*

"Come on Harry, lets take your trunk to my room" said Ron, leading him up the stairs. They went up to the fifth landing of the house, where a large door saying "Ronald's Room" was present. When they opened it, Harry was greeted by a familiar blast of Orange.

"The Chudley Cannons?" asked Harry, pointing at the posters that seemed to cover every inch of the walls.

"Yea...they're 9th in the championship this year...so...how do you like it?" asked Ron in apperhansion.

"It's lovely." Said Harry. "The best home I have ever seen."

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The stay at the burrow was filled with much more action compared to the rest of Harry's summer. This naturally meant more fun for him.

It also meant more opportunities to slip away unnoticed.

Which was why Harry was currently braving the chilly morning weather on an island off the northernmost point of the Scottish coast.

For you see, this was no ordinary island. For one it was unplottable...and with good reason, for it was inhabited only by vicious man-eating carnivores with five legs, also known as Quintapeds. This meant that this island was very, very dangerous.

So naturally, it was the best place to hide something.

So now a frustrated Harry had to spend his time throwing spell after spell on a rocky hill in the middle of the island.

*'Bloody Riddle and his Bloody enchantments...'* mused a clearly irritated Harry.

For that specific rock was guarded by a series of blood wards that ensured no-one would be able to pass by them if the caster was alive,



but without a body. Quite a good piece of magic, as it ensured that when Voldemort wasn't around, no-one could enter.

Harry eventually stopped pummelling the unmovable thing with spells, and sent a few nasty curses at a nearby Quintaped that was creeping to close for comfort.

*'Well, I can't claim that I didn't know this would happen...even if I hoped for the opposite...'* he said to himself, and proceeded to cast some complicated tracking charms on the stone. *'I'll have to come back when snake-face gets a body.'* He mused, before disappearing without a sound.

He re-appeared several miles to the south, on the other side of the country in a forested area in Devon, and made his way through the woods to a clearing and a large house that looked so odd, it was clear that it was held up by magic. That, and the fact that it had so far survived the menace known as the Weasley Twins, but not many outsiders knew about that. Though not many outsiders would come upon the house, since it was so well hidden.

Harry went through the front door to the kitchen, where Mrs Weasley was preparing lunch.

"Where were you Harry dear?" she asked as she moved various flying ingredients around.

"Just taking a walk in the woods" lied the boy smoothly.

"Your Hogwarts Letter arrived while you were gone." She said, handing him a familiar envelope. He read through the letters quickly, keeping a snort of contempt when he read of Lockhart's rather large amount of books.

"You also have a message from the ministry." She said, handing him an envelope with an official Looking blue seal consisting of two intertwined M's.

Harry opened the letter, reading through the text

Dear Mr Potter.

You are requested to attend the hearing of Rodolphus and Rabastan Lestranger on August 19th, due to your relation to the events of June 22 and their subsequent capture by Aurors. You will be required to give a testimony of their actions on that day. Furthermore, we request that you also give a testimony of the events that led to the death of Mrs Bellatrix Lestranger, and the reported use of the unforgivable killing curse by your person. The trial is set to be held in Courtroom 10 at 10:30 in the morning of August the 19th. The hearing will be private, and you are allowed to have up to 4 people escorting you.

Sincerely,

Daren Darkwood,

Department of Magical Law Enforcement,

Ministry of Magic

“Oh” he said “Nothing important...I have to go to the Lestranger trial on august 19th and give a testimony...”

“Really? August the 19th? Oh, and we were thinking of visiting Diagon Alley on that day...Hermione is coming back from her vacation then, she sent a letter to us. I think it must be with Ron, he’s up in his bedroom.” She said.

“Okay” said Harry, darting up the stairs until he came to Ron’s door.

“Hey mate!” said Ron “Where were you all day?”

“Oh, I was just battling some gigantic monsters up in Scotland trying to find some dark artefacts.” Said Harry

“Seriously Harry” answered Ron, not impressed by what he believed to be a blatant lie

“I got a letter form the Ministry” Said Harry, handing over the letter to Ron. “Your Mom said that you got a letter from Hermione...”

“Yeah...it’s over there” said Ron, pointing at the bed-side table. “Blimey Harry, they are going to question you! You think they might put you in prison?”

“I doubt it. She did torture Neville with the cruciatus....and she was planning on bringing old Moldywarts back...I think that will make them ignore my actions...they would have probably given her the Dementor’s kiss anyway.” He answered, looking at the letter. “She says she’s coming over next Wednesday...that’s on the 19th! ....think I should bring her to the trial?”

“Sure mate...can I come?” asked Ron hopefully.

“You are my best friend Ron...I think I’ll take you, Ginny, Hermione and your dad.”

“Why does Ginny get to come?” asked Ron, who was still a little unhappy with Ginny becoming a part of their group.

“Because I said so, and I want no argument from you!” said Harry, sending a glare in Ron’s direction.

“You know Harry, you resemble mum when you talk like that.”

“Well, it is very effective in making you stop arguing with me.” Said Harry, ducking the pillow that came immediately after.

The ensuing pillow-fight kept the boys occupied until Mrs Weasley’s call for lunch interrupted them, and they empty stomachs followed the wonderful scent of food to the kitchen.

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Cheers...Happy New Year!

See that button down there? It is asking for you to press it...come on...you know you want to...

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## **Chapter 8 – Trials and Tribulations**

The morning of August 19th came with a lot of excitement and apprehensions in the Burrow. Mrs Weasley was frantically trying to make sure that Harry, Ginny and Ron would be at least presentable in their appearance at the trial, where most of the important people in the wizarding world would be present. Harry had already suffered a fruitless attack from her comb, whilst Ron was currently having the dirt on his nose rubbed off in a very painful manner. Ginny had wisely chosen to disappear from sight.

“I think that is enough Mum” said George, looking at the torture his younger brother was receiving and struggling not to laugh. “He looks presentable.”

“Though there is still a patch of dirt in his left ear” added Fred.

Mrs Weasley immediately made to grab Ron, but he broke off. “Mum! I’ll be fine!” he said “It’s not like anyone will care what I look like!”

“Ron!” she scolded “The entire elite of wizarding society will be there! We can’t have you looking like a...”

“Molly dear, we have to get going now” came Mr Weasley to the rescue. “Where is Ginny?”

“I’m right here Dad.” Came her voice from the door.

“Right then. Lets get going shall we? Hermione will be waiting for us at the Leaky Cauldron.”

“About bloody time” said Ron in a whisper that was unheard by everyone save Harry. “Bye Mum!”

Mrs Weasley engulfed Ron Ginny and Harry in turn. “Now you behave at the ministry, okay?” she asked.

“Yes, and don’t forget to tell the minister what a moron he is!” said the twins, who then promptly disappeared to spare themselves a scolding.

“Honestly those two...” said Mrs Weasley.

Mr Weasley picked the floo pot, and soon all 4 of them were travelling through the green flames to the Leaky Cauldron.

Harry got out of the fireplace, priding himself in the fact that he had managed to keep himself from falling. Looking in front of him, he saw that Ron had already met up with Hermione. Behind her he recognized her parents, who were already being assaulted by an exited Arthur Weasley, who was currently in the process of talking about his plug collection.

Soon they left Hermione's parents at the pub and went outside. After following MR Weasley through a series of streets that looked shabbier and shabbier as they went on, they eventually arrived at a street with a pub and an overflowing skip. Mr Weasley walked to a telephone box and opened the door.

“Err...right. This won't fit all of us at once...so Ginny, Hermione, you will be coming with me, and the boys can come on their own. Now watch carefully what I am doing, because you will need to repeat it.”

The two girls walked into the box, and Mr Weasley followed, closing the door behind them.

“You need to dial 6-2-4-4-2” he said, dialling the number.

Harry did not hear the woman answering, as there were charms on the box, but he heard Mr Weasley replying

“Arthur Weasley, Hermione Granger and Ginerva Weasley, escorting Harry Potter to hearing at 10:30 in courtroom 10.”

Soon, the floor under them moved, and they were taken to the bowels of the earth. The floor of the phone box replaced itself.

“Come on mate, our turn now.” Said Ron.

Harry walked in with Ron, and after dialling the correct number heard the crisp and loud female voice sounded as if someone was standing next to him.

“Welcome to the Ministry of Magic. Please state your name and business.”

“Harry Potter, here to attend hearing at courtroom 10 and Ronald Weasley, escort of Harry Potter.” Said Harry.

Two silver badges slid out of the chute. Harry put on the one saying *Harry Potter, Hearing Witness* on him.

“Visitor to the Ministry, you are required to submit to a search and present your wand for registration at the security desk, which is located at the far end of the atrium”

Soon, the ground sank beneath them, and they went down into the darkness with only a dull grinding noise as their company. Eventually, they came to a halt, and bright light assaulted them, making their eyes water as they tried to adjust.

“The Ministry of Magic wishes you a pleasant day” said the voice.

They left the booth and went into a large and long hall, with a polished dark wood floor and a blue sealing with inlaid golden symbols that moved around magically. Mr Weasley and the Girls were standing in the middle of the Hall, waiting for them.

“Come along now” said the voice of Mr Weasley. We have lots to do.

They through the crowds and past a large fountain with the golden statues of a wizard, a witch, a centaur a goblin and a house-elf. They eventually came to a halt in front of a security desk.

“Wands please” grunted the wizard, putting down a Daily Prophet that, from what Harry managed to glimpse, was talking about a broomstick pile-up near some muggle town.

The children gave their wands, and the wizard examined them using a strange brass instrument. Finally, after asking about them, he gave them back.

“This way now.” said Mr Weasley.

The children followed him through the golden gates that signified the entrance to the ministry, and they eventually reached a hall with about twenty lifts behind wrought golden grilles.

They entered the lift, and Mr Weasley pressed the button representing the 9th floor.

The lift began to descend, until finally a cool female voice said "Department of Mysteries."

"Level 10 is just down here" said Mr Weasley, turning down a set of stairs "The lifts don't go down to it...security reasons from what I understand..."

They came to a halt in front of a heavy dark door with a large iron lock.

"They should be starting in a quarter of an hour" said Mr Weasley, looking at a pocket watch "Let's go take our seats."

They entered the square dark stone dungeon and proceeded to sit at the benches that rose around the centre of the room.

"Over here Harry!" said a voice near them. They turned and saw Neville sitting with his grandmother on one of the benches nearest to the centre of the room.

They sat down next to him, and started talking in whispers. Meanwhile, Mr Weasley began explaining to them about the figures in the room.

"That man over there" he said, pointing to a portly little man "is the Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge. The one next to him is the senior undersecretary, Dolores Umbridge and the man sitting in the back Rufus Scrimgeour, head of the Auror Office." Then he pointed towards a well-dressed man with a small, neat moustache and straight grey hair. "That is Barty Crouch, the Head of the Department of Law enforcement. He used to be minister a few years back, but some kind of scandal with his son and then his wife dying made him lose a lot of popularity, and Fudge won the last election. He is quite fanatical against dark wizards...he is the one behind all the laws

against them. He still has a large base of support in the ministry...and Fudge is worried about that. Crouch tried to send them to Azkaban immediately without a trial, but Fudge intervened. ”

*‘And he will try to use this trial to bring himself back into popularity...which is something that I can use.’*

Harry had thought about this trial for the past week, and had studied a lot about the political situation and power-bases within the Wizengamot. Now, he was ready to use the power shifts to get some of his goals accomplished.

“Bring them in” sounded the voice of one of the court members once the appointed time for the trial came.

The door opened, and four dementors came in flanking Rabastan and Rodolphus Lestrange. They placed the two men onto the chairs in the centre of the room, and the chains immediately bound them.

Crouch stood up, and Harry could see a mixture of hatred and greed in his face.

“You have been brought here in front of the court of magical law, so that we may judge your despicable actions. You are accused of over two decades of dark activity, allegiance with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, repeated use of illegal magics, murder and torture of innocents, including young children, assault, conspiracy for murder, conspiracy to overthrow the ministry, and conspiracy to return your exiled master into power.”

“He forgot to add being slimy and ugly gits” whispered Ron from nearby, but was silenced by a glare from Mrs Longbottom.

“How do you plead?” asked one of the judges, peering at them from above the bench.

Rabastan looked nervous, but Rodolphus stared blankly and resignedly at the judge. “The Dark Lord will return, and we who are loyal will be rewarded.” he said in a flat, emotionless voice.



The trial then begun, with various witnesses being brought forth, detailing the long and dark path that the Lestranges had followed in their lives. Two decades of dark activity were covered, and evidence was presented. Finally, Neville gave his account of how he was tortured by Lestrangle, leaving out certain parts and making it extra tearful after being advised by Harry.

“The court would like to call on Harry James Potter.” Said the imperious voice of the head judge.

Harry got up slowly, and walked towards one of the chairs in the centre of the room. He cast a glance at the Lestranges, sporting a sneer, and sat down, facing the Wizengamot.

He gave an account of the ambush, making sure to focus on the torture that Bellatrix gave and the sadistic pleasure she seemed to derive from giving pain. He summarised his duel up to the point that the Aurors arrived.

The court then asked him several questions to double-check his story, and he answered them easily, already bored with the court proceedings. After some time, they came to the part about Bella.

“Now Mr Potter” said Fudge. “Upon examination of Mrs Lestrangle’s body, we found the cause of her death to be the killing curse, and the two Lestranges and the aurors that were near the scene at the time report that you are the one that cast said illegal curse.”

“I do not deny it.” Said Harry.

“You do understand that the use of that curse on humans is forbidden.” Said the Minister.

“These beings cannot be regarded as Humans!” shouted a wizard next to Mr Crouch, and his remark was met with approval by many of the people around him.

“Silence!” said Fudge. “They may be criminals, but they are humans, and thus the use of unforgivables on them is illegal.”

"I don't think so Cornelius." Said the voice of Crouch. "If you remember, the unforgivables may be used against death eaters. I passed the law myself."

"Only by Aurors!" shouted Fudge

Harry sank back in the chair and watched the two politicians battle it out. *'I knew something like this would happen...now I just have to play this part right...and I'll get exactly what I want'*

"And, under clause 8 of the Defence Law Against Death Eaters, the wizengemot has may clear any user of said unforgivable curses against death eaters should it be found that it was done in self defence and under circumstances of severe mortal peril." Said Crouch calmly.

"I think Cornelius" said the voice of Albus Dumbledore from behind the stands "That Mr Potter's behaviour can be excused in light of the torture that he and Mr Longbottom endured, and the attempt by the Lestranges to return Lord Voldemort to power."

"The matter shall be put to the vote." Said a woman, which Harry recognized as Amelia Bones.

"Those who think that Mr Potter shouldn't be charged due to clause 8 of the Defence Law Against Death Eaters please raise your hands..."

Harry had the backing of Dumbledore, Crouch and the added bonus of being a close friend and saving the life of the boy-who-lived. So it was not a surprise that apart from some people around Fudge, the majority of the court cleared Harry.

"Mr Potter will not be charged for use of unforgivables." said Mrs Bones.

Harry moved back to his friends as the court started calling on some of the Aurors. Harry could see from the faces in the Wizengemot that today was a victorious day for Crouch, and he could hear some people whispering that he would probably win the next election if he ran for office.

Soon the testimonies finished, and the time came for the court to decide what should be done with the two death eaters. Crouch once again stood up.

“It is now time for the jury to pass its judgement. Those of you who think that think, as I do, that they should be given a life term in Azkaban, please raise your hands.”

In unison, the court members raised their hands. The crowds stood up and started clapping, Harry with them, sporting a smug smile.

“Take them away” said Crouch, with a glorious expression.

The dementors glided back in, and led the two prisoners away, while the crowds jeered. Soon, the members of the court stood up, and people started leaving the room.

The group was oddly silent as they moved through the hall on the 10th floor. They were ready to go up to the lifts, when they were stopped by Mr Crouch.

“You did very well there Mr Potter” he said. “I say that we should have no pity for these Dark Wizards...you are a shining example of how we should treat them. You could reach very far Mr Potter...very far indeed. We need young people such as you in the world.”

“Thank you Mr Crouch.” *‘You power-hungry maniac...you’re just as bad as Fudge, only less incompetent...which makes you more dangerous...I won’t have you heading the government Crouch...and I know just the way to get rid of you...’*

“Well, we have to get going Barty.” Cut in Mr Weasley. “Busy day today.”

“Yes indeed Arthur.” He said “I’ve been meaning to talk to you. Domisworth, from the Committee on Experimental Charms wants to talk to you...says that they found some muggle...fireleg? It has some strange charms on it, they want you to look at the muggle part of the mechanism, see what has been altered.”

“Ah...firearms. Well, I’ll get to it as soon as possible, thank you Barty.”

With those words, they went up the stairs and prepared to turn towards the lifts. Just then, Harry stopped by a large door on the side of the stairs.

“That’s the department of mysteries Harry...top secret stuff...can’t go in there.”

“What do they do in there?” asked Ron

“Nobody knows, that’s why it is called the department of mysteries. The ones that work in it are called unspeakables, because they are sworn to secrecy by a magical oath.”

They came to one of the lifts, which opened to let them in. A flock of paper airplanes exited the lift.

“Inter-departmental memos...we used to have owls, but they made a right mess of things, droppings everywhere.” He said, pressing the button for the Atrium. The doors clanged shut and the lift began to ascend.

They came out to the now almost empty Atrium. The security wizard was hidden behind the daily prophet, and he could see some of the court judges talking to what looked like reporters nearby.

“Come on, it’s almost half past one. Let’s head over to the Leaky Cauldron for lunch and then we can get your school supplies.” Said Mr Weasley, walking towards the visitor’s exit.

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They had lunch with Hermione’s parents, who had already bought her the school supplies that she needed, as well as a large amount of books for light reading. To the dismay of Mr and Mrs Granger, Mr Weasley spent a large amount of lunch asking about the ‘felliophone’.

Eventually, they bade goodbye to Hermione and her parents, and went to get school supplies for themselves and for the rest of the Weasley family in Hogwarts.

They first went to Gringotts to get what they needed. Harry was once again ashamed by the amount of wealth he had, compared to the meagre amount that the Weasley's had stored in their vault. They were getting ready to leave when a goblin came to them.

"Mr Potter. Brandok, the manager of the Black estate, would like to speak to you regarding the matter that you discussed two months ago." Said the goblin in Gobbledegook.

"Very well, I shall meet him now." Responded Harry in the same language. He turned to the Weasleys, who were looking at him surprised at his knowledge of the goblin tongue. "I have some business to take care of, it shouldn't take too long, where should I meet you?"

"Erm...we are just going to get some robes, and then we'll be at Ollivander's to get a look at Ginny's wand...are you sure you will be..." Started Mr Weasley, nervous about leaving Harry in the care of the Goblins.

"I'll be fine Mr Weasley, don't worry about me. I'll meet you there." Said Harry, and followed the Goblin to Brandok's office.

"Greetings Mr Potter." Said the dark skinned Goblin.

"Greeting to you as well Brandok. What business is it that requires my presence here?"

"Ahh...Well, we have been investigating what we talked about last time...and we have made some investigations of our own."

"I have heard quite a lot about the quality of your contacts. I trust you have found something."

"Indeed. We have collected quite a lot of proof that supports that Mr Pettigrew was indeed alive after the events that led to Mr Black's incarceration. We have managed to piece together his movements

during the first five years after that event, but since then, he has seemingly vanished...we do believe that, at some point, he even came in contact with the Lestranges. His current whereabouts however are unknown." The goblin then passed several documents that gave proof of Wormtail's movements.

"Indeed. I am impressed by these findings Brandok" said Harry while looking over the papers.

"Mr Pettigrew's disappearance however has created some problems...we could give these documents to the Ministry, and if we could secure a trial, we might be able to set him free, but I fear that this will be buried by the bureaucracy."

"I think I may have a solution to that problem Brandok." spoke Harry, hiding a victorious smirk.

"Please do tell me what you have in mind Mr Potter."

"Well, you are aware of the current political tension within the Ministry?"

"I assume you are speaking about the conflict between Mr Crouch and Minister Fudge. We have been watching that rather closely, given that both wizards are likely to make a move against us in their bid for power."

"Yes. Well, as you may be aware, Crouch is the one responsible for my godfather's rather...hasty incarceration and lack of a trial." Began Harry

"And given the surge of popularity that Mr Crouch is likely to gain from the capture of the Lestranges, the Minister will be looking for a way to discredit him" Said the Goblin, completing Harry's thoughts.

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Harry left the bank about half an hour later, having discussed at length with Brandok their plans for Sirius. He made his way down the street and passed the second hand robe shop. Seeing that the

Weasley's weren't there, he made his way to Ollivander's. He walked into the shop, seeing only Ginny and Ron and their Father.

"Mr Potter." Said Mr Ollivander, looking at Harry with his Moonlike eyes. "Holly and Phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple....quite an interesting wand that you had...and a most curious one as well."

"Hello Mr Ollivander. Would you happen to have any wand sheaths?" he asked.

"Certainly...I'll just be a moment. Miss Weasley, your wand suits you quite well...you will not be needing a new one." Said the old man, retreating to the back of the shop.

"Hello Harry" said Mr Weasley. "Good thing you came, we had just finished examining Ginny's wand."

"What did the goblins want you for mate?" asked Ron.

"Politics." Said Harry shortly.

"What kind of politics?" asked the red-haired boy.

"Oh you know...planning the next Goblin to overthrow the ministry...trying to get convicts out of Azkaban...just normal stuff."

Ron rolled his eyes and looked outside at the crowds passing the alley.

"What did Ollivander mean by saying your wand was curious?" asked Ginny.

"It is the brother wand to Lord Voldemort." Said Harry, ignoring the shudders that circulated around the red-heads at the mention of the name.

"Blimey, your wand is the brother to you-know-who's?" asked Ron, with his eyes wide.

"I do believe that I just said that." answered Harry. Ollivander chose that moment to return with the wand sheaths.

"Here you are Mr Potter, all of these will fit the length of you wand. They all come equipped with anti-summoning charms." He said, presenting him with a large basket.

Harry picked on made from dragon-hide that would tie around his left wrist.

"That will be 3 galleons Mr Potter."

Harry paid the wand-maker, and then left the shop with the Weasleys.

"How about we all split up." He looked at his wristwatch and noticed it was half past 3. "How about we meet in Flourish and Blotts in about an hour?"

They agreed, and everyone went their separate ways to get their school supplies. Harry turned back towards Gringotts, and he stood for a while, watching the others. He saw Ron captivated by Quidditch Quality Supplies, and the others were not looking his way, so he quickly ducked into Knockturn alley.

He made his way past the crowds and collected his various supplies at much lower prices than those offered in Diagon Alley. Finally, he came to Borgin and Burkes, the largest establishment on the road.

He entered the shop, and walked towards the counter.

"And what are you doing here?" asked the smooth voice of Mr Borgin.

Harry turned towards the oily-haired man. "Just looking to see if there is anything...unusual that may attract my interest here. I assure you I have enough money to cover any expenses."

"Very well Mr...."

"Potter. Harry Potter." said Harry in a way that was oddly reminiscent of James Bond.



“Well Mr Potter, please refrain from touching or damaging anything.” Said MR Borgin, and proceeded to watch Harry like a Hawk.

Harry looked around the shop, until he spotted a withered looking hand.

“Ahh...the Hand of Glory” he said. “What an interesting artefact...how much would it cost?”

“500 Galleons.” Said the shop-keeper

“This thing? It would barely be worth 50...not to mention that it was probably acquired illegally, so it should be worth even less than that.”

“The Hand of Glory is a Highly prized artefact! It will give light only to the bearer. 400 galleons.”

“For this withered hand? Okay, it may be useful for a thief, but I am no thief...100 galleons.”

“I will inform you that these are highly sought after! I will make a bargain for you, 300 galleons.”

“If you insist that it is so precious, which I doubt, I will give you 200 galleons for it.”

“250 galleons Mr Potter, that is my final offer.”

“250 galleons it is then.” Said Harry, closing the deal.

Just as Mr Borgin was wrapping the withered hand, Draco Malfoy and his father entered the shop.

“Hello Draco, nice to see you.” Said Harry.

“Potter...what are you doing here?” asked the blonde boy, sneering.

“None of your business.” Answered Harry shortly. “Pleasure doing business with you Mr Borgin.” He said, taking the package and walking out of the shop and into the dark alley. Deep in thought.

He could not detect the presence of Riddle's diary on the senior Malfoy when he made a slight magical scan on him. So that meant that either he didn't have it, or he had already gotten rid of it.

He walked with a fast pace towards Flourish and Blotts. Hanging on the door was a sign saying

GILDEROY LOCKHART

Will be signing his autobiography

MAGICAL ME

Today, from 12:30 to 4:30 pm

Harry looked at his pocket-watch. The time was 5 pm. *'Good...we've missed him. Incompetent buffoon.'*

"Hello Harry" said a voice nearby.

Harry turned, and saw a readheaded girl standing nearby.

"Hello Ginny. I see we've missed Lockhart....where are the others?"

"They went inside. Did you know that Lockhart is going to be our Defence Against the Dark Professor? That's why we have to buy all his books...if you ask me, they are all a pack of self-promotional lies..." she said.

"You know, he worked as an obliviator....I wouldn't think it unlikely that he has stolen all those stories from people whose memories he has erased."

"Seems likely...but don't let Mom hear you say that...I think she fancies him." Said the girl, suppressing a laugh of mirth.

"She and almost every witch in England." added Harry with a snort  
"Lets go find the others then."

"You'll never guess who I met." said Harry once they reached Ron.

"Merlin?" asked Ron.

"No, Malfoy. He and his father were shopping in Borgin and Burkes." Answered Harry.

"Did Malfoy buy anything?" Asked Mr Weasley's voice behind him.

"I didn't exactly stay to chat, but I'd expect that he probably wanted to sell, not buy."

"You think he is getting scared eh?" said Mr Weasley in a thoughtful voice. "Wait, what were you doing in Knockturn alley?"

"Shopping" said Harry, while at the same time Ron said "Knockturn alley? Blimey, they never let us go there!"

"And with good reason." added Mr Weasley sternly. "It's a dark place, not safe. You shouldn't go around there Harry."

"It is a good place to get certain things." Said Harry cryptically. "now let's get our books."

The Weasley's had already purchased most of the books from the second hand section of Flourish and Blotts. Harry quickly purchased all the books on his list, withholding a snort of disgust when he picked up Lockhart's books. He then decided to take some other books that would help him, like *Most Potente Potions* and *Magick Moste Evile*.

He walked back to Ron and Ginny, only to find Malfoy there.

"How did you pay for those books Weasley? Went out in the streets and begged?" said the sneering voice of the youngest member of the pureblood family.

Before the red-faced Ron could react, Harry had walked up and stood between him and Malfoy.

"Evening Draco. What brings you here on this fine day?" he asked with mock politeness.

"Well if it isn't Potty...I should expect you to go around with blood traitors like the Weasleys...after all, your mother was a mudblood." Said the blonde boy.

Harry made to grab his wand, but before he could do anything, Malfoy had to fall on the floor to avoid a book thrown by a furious Ginny.

“Get lost Malfoy!” she hissed venomously.

“A...another blood traitor. So is this how you managed to buy your books? Selling the youngest Weasley off to Potter?”

In a second, Harry had his wand pointing at Malfoy’s throat.

“Want to join your dear aunt Bella in the grave ferret?” he said in a menacing tone that sent shivers down the pureblood boy’s spine.

Malfoy made a step back, walking into his father, who had chosen that moment to appear.

“Well...if it isn’t Mr Potter...I have heard quite a lot about you...” commented the elder Malfoy.

“Indeed...you could say that I lead a fairly interesting life.” answered Harry, sporting an evil grin.

Mr Weasley came near at that moment, and it was not long before he and Lucius Malfoy were exchanging insults. Mr Weasley was red-faced and ready to strike Malfoy with his fists, but Harry stepped in before it was too late.

“I do not think that you should touch that thing Mr Weasley. You might get sick.” He said, whilst sensing Malfoy’s magic again and finding nothing dark that would signify a Hoxcrux. Though he did notice that the silver serpent-head cane the pureblood carried around had a poisoned dart in it. “Let’s go, before they cause a scene to inflate their ego.” He said, and they walked on to pay for their books, leaving a livid death eater behind.

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The full moon shone on the waters of the river otter near Ottery St Catchpole. If one could see through the darkness of the night, they would notice a raven haired boy by the river bank.

They would also notice said boy chanting in a unidentifiable tongue, which sounded so deep and unnatural, that it would send shivers down any human being's spine.

But nobody was there to notice, thanks to some well placed notice-me-not charms to keep muggles away and wards to stop the ministry from detecting the large amount of magical activity in the area.

The animals in the forest however had gathered, watching the spectacle transfixed, yet unable to entirely comprehend what was going on.

The light of the moon shone on a liquid-red substance that was arranged in a pentagram around the boy. Upon closer examination, one could see that the substance was blood. As the words of the boy became louder, the pentagram began floating in the air and glowed an eerie red-blue colour.

Suddenly, the boy shouted some arcane words, and a large magical pulse made all the animals flee, unsettled. The pentagram disappeared, and the boy fell onto his knees into the river, visibly tired.

He stayed still like that for almost half an hour and if someone looked they would see a blank, vacant expression in eyes which had momentarily lost their emerald colour and had become pure white. Then, the emerald returned, and the waters around the boy started moving violently.

The water rose into the air, and started swirling around the boy, engulfing him in a typhoon of water, air and magical energy. They slowly began losing their violence, and eventually settled into a controlled stream around him. After a few minutes, the water cascaded back into the river.

"Well...that was certainly fun..." mumbled an exhausted Harry, as he picked himself off the riverbed and started walking towards the burrow. "Though I feel like I have been run over by a pack of Hippogriffs..."

"Harry?" asked a soft voice nearby.

Harry froze. He turned around slowly only to gaze into the bright brown eyes of Ginny Weasley.

"Hello Ginny." He said smoothly in a dark, alluring voice.

"Wh...What were you doing there?" she asked.

"Releasing some of my magic...I need to train my magical muscle from time to time." Said Harry smoothly. It was a half truth of course, but he wasn't about to reveal that he had used a highly dangerous and unknown blood ritual to increase his core power.

"You were doing magic? It looked...it looked both scary and beautiful at the same time."

"That is the nature of this magic...it has an odd allure, yet it is always mixed with a veiled threat...I had to use both water and lunar magical elements...quite an interesting effect wouldn't you say?"

"You did underage magic? Isn't that illegal Harry? What if you get in trouble?" she asked softly, a hint of worry in her voice.

"The ministry doesn't know...and you won't tell them, will you Ginny?"

"No...I won't. But what you did...I felt a sort of pull towards it..."

"All beings feel an attraction to large concentrations of magical energy...you will feel like this when you come near Hogwarts too...I probably made all the gnomes in the garden come out too. Hear how quiet it is? Every animal is silenced by the energy...the form of the magic is quite similar to that vampires use to charm their victims...it plays on the subconscious, tempting it..." he said in a voice that sounded old and young at the same time, filled with a strange wisdom.

"How can you do that? I have never heard of things like this before." she asked, enthralled.

"I am a very powerful wizard Ginny...potentially more powerful than Dumbledore...I know many things about magic. Though I would appreciate if you didn't exactly spread what I can do around...the

press would start hounding me, and many people would probably fear me...”

“Don’t worry Harry.” She said, smiling. “My lips are sealed. Though I am sure that I might accidentally slip something off to Ron or Hermione if you don’t agree with my every whim...” she began with a mischievous grin.

“I am serious Ginny.”

“Fine...I won’t tell anyone.” She pouted. “But only because it’s you. And you had better share some of your knowledge when we’re at school Mr Potter!”

“Don’t worry ...when I am done with you, people will tremble in the name of the great and fearsome Ginny Weasley!” *‘More than you’ll ever know infact.’*

“You aren’t going to turn me into another version of the twins are you? Because I like some fun, but they take it way too...”

“I will make you into a powerful witch Ginny...don’t forget, you are a member of the Shades...I’m taking your training seriously.” *‘Because after all, you will have a war to fight.’*

“Really?” she asked, her eyes filled with an unidentifiable emotion.

“Really.”

“Thank you Harry.” She smiled.

Meanwhile, several miles to north east, deep under London, the minister’s office shone with light.

The ministry was mostly quiet at night-time. There were a few personnel on night shifts, but most ministry workers were either at home, sound asleep, or out making raids.

The minister was at his office, which was strange at this hour. What was even stranger was that he appeared to be intently studying a package of documents in front of him.

Now, minister Fudge was incompetent and lazy, but he was a powerful politician. And the evil grin that was on his face as he was studying the documents would have made his enemies very anxious if they could see it.

Slowly, the Minister stood up, and called his Secretary.

“I think I may just have a way to stop Crouch from gaining power after all. Please send word to Azkaban...I want a prisoner, Sirius Black, delivered here...and make sure no-one hears about this...understood?” He said with a gleam in his eyes.

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## Chapter 9 – Start of School

Kings Cross station was, as usual, the site of a bustling chaos on the morning of September 1st. Within the mass of muggles walking to and from various platforms, a clan of redheads, accompanied by the odd addition of a smirking raven-haired, emerald-eyed boy, made its way to the area between platforms 9 and 10.

If it wasn't for the busy atmosphere of the station and the myriad anti-muggle and notice-me-not charms placed on the barriers between the two platforms, one of the passer-by's might have noted that, pair-by-pair, the people seemed to simply vanish into the wall. If they could have followed them, they would enter a new world, as well as coming before a large crimson train labelled *Hogwarts Express*.

"Ron! Harry!" sounded a pitched scream from nearby. Two of the boys turned around only to be assaulted by a bushy-haired blur.

"Hello Hermione." Said Ron chuckling and blushing at the same time.

The newly reunited trio spent some time talking before the rest of the Weasley Siblings decided to inform them that they had to get on the train before it left.

Or, as Ginny eloquently put it, "Get your bums over there before Mum turns into a grizzly."

So the large group boarded the train, the twins soon leaving to find their partner in crime, Lee, and Percy pompously declaring that he had to "attend to my duty as a prefect."

So that left a nervous Ginny and a trio to find a compartment.

"How about this?" asked Harry, eyeing a compartment with two girls, who looked unsorted judging by their age.

"There are already people in here..." began Ron.

"Nonsense! There's enough space, and besides, we'll get to make some new friends!" *'Who may turn into loyal fighters...'*

"Honestly Ron, why shouldn't we go in there?" asked Hermione, opening the door and walking in. "Hello, mind if we sit here?" she asked.

"Erm...No, go ahead." Said one of the girls, a sandy-haired blonde with dark black eyes. "I'm Jess Drys, by the way."

"Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, Ginny Weasley" said Harry, pointing towards the others "and I'm Harry Potter."

"Rebecca Applestone." Answered the dark-haired girl sitting next to her. Looking at Harry she continued "You're the one that caught those Death-Eaters aren't you."

"Yeah...almost got killed doing it too..." *'Something which will never have a chance of happening once I finish training this stupid child core and body to its full potential.'* "but it was worth it to put them in Azkaban."

"My mother said that it was about time that justice was done...she said she didn't feel safe when they couldn't find them....though she wanted to know how a second year could defeat them..." said Jess

"Well...I'm pretty powerful....and all I did really was hold them off until the Aurors came..."

"What are you talking about?" asked Jess, clearly confused.

"Muggleborn?" said Ron.

"Yes..."

The ones versed in the magical world launched into a short explanation of the rise and fall of the Dark Lord Voldemort, along with the reign of terror his death eaters had. The train had not yet moved from the station when a ferret appeared.

"What do you want Malfoy?" asked Ginny venomously.

"If it isn't the Weasellette, Weasel, Potty, the Mudblood know-it-all and what looks like another Mudblood...really Potter, I would expect

you to eventually find better company, though I am sure you would enjoy the services provided by the Weasellette Potter.” said the Blonde boy.

From the corner of his eye Harry saw Ron going red and Ginny gaining an evil grin while they were both raising their wands, curses at the tip of their tongues. Hermione looked torn between giving Malfoy a taste of her knowledge of jinxes and abiding by the rules whilst the other two girls just looked scared. Before anyone could act though, Harry stood up.

“Aaahh...Draco! Just the one I wanted to see! Come on, I want to have a word with you.” He said, with a very large and very infuriating smile.

“Wha...” started Malfoy, but was pulled outside by Harry, who closed the door behind him. He moved further down the corridor, making Malfoy follow him along with his two goons.

“What do you want Potter?” spat Malfoy.

Harry grinned and held his hand towards Malfoy. The boy was raised in the air and started choking as if his neck was hanging in an invisible noose. Crabbe and Goyle just watched motionless, too dumb to act, although Harry had cast a confusion charm to help them.

“Enjoying this Malfoy?” said Harry smirking. He waved his hand and released the boy, who immediately fell to the ground on his knees, grasping for air. Harry kicked him.

“Malfoy Malfoy Malfoy.” started Harry in a babylike voice. “When you speak to me, you do so in the appropriate manner, which means kneeling and kissing the hem of my robes.”

He waved his hand again, forcing Malfoy’s unwilling body to kiss his trainers, which had to suffice in the absence of robes.

“Much better.”

He sent Malfoy into the wall, knocking him unconscious, hearing the snap of bones and feeling satisfied. He left Crabbe and Goyle to

attend to their master and walked back to his compartment whistling an innocent tone.

“What did you do to him Harry?” asked Ginny.

“Ooh, I held him under an illegal dark torture curse until he begged for mercy.”

“Harry!” said Hermione, while the two girls looked at him fearfully. “You can’t do that! What if a teacher learns?”

“I was just joking! I only hexed him a bit.”

Hermione and the girls looked relieved. Ginny however held an almost disappointed look in her eyes. Harry leaved over and whispered in her ear.

“I almost choked him to death, then made him kneel and kiss my feet before knocking him into a wall and breaking some of his ribs.”

Ginny giggled “They’re going to catch you if you leave visible damage like that Harry.”

she whispered back.

“School hasn’t started yet, and I don’t think that Malfoy will bear the humiliation of telling someone he was beaten. Plus, I think he fears me now.”

“We’ll have to make sure to reinforce that fear...I think a few nasty pranks should do that.” She said, a grin coming to her face as she started thinking about ways to make Malfoy suffer.

“I’ll teach you a few ways to make slimy gits like him beg for mercy in our first group meeting.” Said Harry, feeling his heart lift as he saw her grateful and contemplative smirk fill her face as her bright brown eyes stared into his soul.

“Oi, what are you two talking about packed over there like a pair of thieves.” exclaimed Ron.

“Oh Ronnie” said Ginny “We were just plotting on how to turn some of your clothes into spiders. I was just saying how we should have a camera ready to make sure we immortalise you running around in your underwear screaming your head off.”

Ron turned beet red and threw a death glare towards the pair, while to his horror, they and the rest of the compartment started laughing. He compromised for staring outside the window as the train started picking up speed and finally left the station.

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Several Hours later, after the children had exhausted most topics of conversation, munched on the sweets that the trolley lady brought by, Neville came to their compartment, waking up Ginny who reddened a bit when she realised she had fallen asleep leaning on Harry. Hermione looked up from her book ruffled whilst Ron looked up from a chess-match he was having with the muggle-born girl, Jess.

“Quick, hide me!” said Neville frantically

“What’s going on mate?” asked Ron.

“There’s this kid named Creepy or something, he’s stalking me for an autograph! And he talks so much! I can’t get a moment peace! You must find somewhere so that he can’t see me.”

Harry lazily waved his wand, opening his trunk and covering Neville with his invisibility cloak. Right on cue, an exitable short boy with mousy hair came through the compartment door.

“Have you seen Neville Longbottom?” he asked exited

“He just passed by, he went towards the front of the train.” lied Harry smoothly.

“Thanks.” Said the breathless boy and immediately scurried away.

Once the coast was safe, Neville took off the invisibility cloak.

“That was a close one. I don’t know why I didn’t think about using my cloak.” he said.

“It’s a good thing we have Harry to lead us then isn’t it?” answered Ginny with a large smile.

“You’re Neville Longbottom?” asked Rebecca Applestone.

“Er..yeah.” said Neville apprehensively.

“You defeated that dark wizard?” asked Jess, now completely distracted from her chess game.

“Moldywarts. Yes, his killing curse backfired.” said Harry.

The two girls introduced themselves to Neville, and the seven of them passed the rest of the journey in a conversation, with Harry trying to convince them to call Voldemort as Voldemort, but only managing to make Ginny and the muggle-born girl say the name out loud.

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Finally, Hogwarts Express arrived at Hogsmeade. As the first years followed Hagrid’s giant form, Harry and the others boarder the thestral-driven carriages and went to the castle. Once there, they passed hurriedly through the bustle of the crowd of students, who seemed aching to get to Harry and Neville to question them. They finally reached Gryffindor table, where they sat down, with the Gryffindors friendliest to them sitting around them in a protective fashion.

Finally, the whispers in the tables stopped as the door opened and the Deputy Headmistress, McGonagall, led a group of apprehensive first years in the hall.

She placed a sorting hat on a stool, and the eyes of all the students immediately shifted to it.

The hat opened its mouth and began to sing.

“Thousands of years ago,

there were four great people that you should know.  
For they were great witches and wizards indeed.  
Each of them had completed more than one mighty deed.  
They were Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff but also  
Gryffindor and Slytherin, I know.  
They sought to teach the world their art  
After all, they wanted to play their part.  
So they made this great school  
That did not produce any fool.  
Yet they hit upon a little snag  
How to divide the students, now that was hard.”  
“Gryffindor wanted the noble and the brave,  
Ravenclaw the brilliant and intelligent  
Slytherin those whose blood was pure and who had cunning  
And Hufflepuff would take them all,  
and teach them the virtue of loyalty and hard work.”  
“So they thought long and they debated.  
Until finally, I was created.  
Into you minds I must look  
And into your place you shall be put.  
So have no fear, I am no simple hat,

/ am the Sorting Hat!"

The students all clapped, and some of the fear disappeared from the eyes of the eleven year olds lined up in front of the hall, though they still looked nervous, which was after all understandable.

McGonagall picked up the scroll and started reading names.

"Abxley, Martin" she called.

A brown haired boy strode confidently towards the hat. It was not long before it shouted:

"SLYTHERIN!"

and the boy walked towards the green-clad table that was clapping.

"Applestone, Rebecca"

"RAVENCLAW!"

"Baker, Thomas"

"HUFFLEPUFF!"

"Bulston, Miller"

"GRYFFINDOR!"

Harry started clapping with the rest of his table.

"Creevy, Colin."

"GRYFFINDOR!"

Harry once again clapped, withholding a chuckle at the groan he heard coming from Neville.

"Drys, Jessica!"

"GRYFFINDOR!"



Harry clapped for the muggleborn girl that he met in the train, while his table was happy that it got 3 students.

Gryffindor had gained three more students, namely Victoria Frobisher, Jack Sloper and Andrew Kirke when Ginny's turn came to be sorted.

The Weasleys and the Shades watched the young girl move to the hat. She put it on, staying under it for a long time until murmurs started appearing in the hall. Finally, Harry concentrated a beam of legilimency towards the hat.

*'But I want to be in Gryffindor!'* he heard the mental voice of Ginny say.

*'Girl, your blood may be in Gryffindor, but you have turned as cunning as any snake. You will do well in'* **"SLYTHERIE"** before the hat could finish its words, Harry stepped in.

*'Stop.'*

*'Mr Potter, please stay out, this is not your sorting.'* Said the hat irritably.

*'Harry?'* he heard Ginny ask

*'Ginny belongs in Gryffindor. She will never be accepted as a Slytherin, she needs to be with us. Look again, she may be cunning, but she is brave as well.'*

*'I may have refrained from placing you into Slytherin Mr Potter, but that does not mean that I will do it again...though you seem to have changed a lot.'*

*'Please put me in Gryffindor.'* Pleaded Ginny, hoping it would help her case.

*'Do not separate her from the rest of us Albion.'*

*'How do you know my name Mr Potter?'*

*'If you place Miss Weasley with us, I promise that I will have a long chat with you...help you ease a boring school year.'*

*'I was right when I said you would have done well in Slytherin Mr Potter.'* said the hat's mental voice, which sounded resigned in the face of the determination from the two students. *'Well, Miss Weasley, since you seem to have so much support, I will put you where your heart belongs.'* **"GRYFFINDOR!"**

Ginny took the hat off her head and walked to the Gryffindor table. Everyone's eyes were on her, and no-one was clapping, as they were too stunned by the Hat's decision being reversed mid-stride. Finally, Harry started clapping, the sound sounding reverberating oddly in the silent hall. Ron, Percy and the Twins soon followed along with Hermione and Neville.

By the time Ginny was half-way to the table, all the Gryffindors had started clapping, followed by a polite clap from the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws, but everyone was still confused. Ginny sat between Harry and Neville, slightly red in the face.

McGonagall was still staring at her in surprise, when Harry coughed rather loudly, and she finished the sorting with Z Walton, Mark becoming a Hufflepuff and Yalgy, Freisha being sorted into Slytherin.

Once the attention was off her, Ginny leaned to Harry and hissed "How. Did. You. Do. That?"

"Legilimency. I'll teach you later." Offered Harry, who went silent and watched Dumbledore speak and introduce Gilderoy Lockhart as the new professor, to the general applause of the majority of the female population and the slight disgust of some of the male, who looked between him and the girls with glares.

**..0..**

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was eerily quiet as night approached. Most of the students had already gone to their common-rooms, as curfew was in only one hour. If one were to listen carefully however, they would hear the soft sound of hurried footprints on the seventh floor. If their eyes could penetrate the darkness, they would

notice a door appearing out of nowhere into the wall, and then opening and closing, only to disappear again.

If they had managed to enter while the door was open, they would notice five figures appearing, seemingly from the shadows, discarding two invisibility cloaks.

“Well, what do you think about this being our headquarters?” said Harry.

Hermione was eyeing the numerous and useful books that were lined in shelves around the room. “We have everything we need in here! What is this place.”

“The room of requirement. If you need something, it shall provide. Nobody but the house-elves really knows about this, so it is a good secret place.”

“But what if we get caught while coming here?” asked Ron.

“Well, we do have invisibility cloaks.” answered Neville.

“And something else. Did you get the map Ginny?” said Harry.

Ginny nodded, and handed him a piece of parchment. “Fred and George said they’ve memorised the entire thing anyway.”

“That’s just some parchment.” observed Neville.

“I solemnly swear I am to no good.” said Harry

Those words activated the map, and he heard a gasp coming from Ron.

“This is the Marauder’s map. My father and his friends made it. Really useful little bugger isn’t it?”

“Wow....we can use this for almost anything!” said Ron.

“Very impressive charms on this thing...and it tracks everyone? Wow” said Hermione, fascinated with the magical device in front of her.

The group sat around the fireplace that the room provided, making their plans for the school year. Finally, as they were nodding off to sleep, they returned to the Gryffindor common room.

“G’night Gin, Mione.” said Harry, faking a yawn and walking up the stairs. He lay in his bed and closed the curtain covers until he heard Ron and Neville settle into their beds and join Dean and Seamus in dream land. He then snuck out of his bed and covered himself with the invisibility cloak.

He moved stealthily down the stairs to the common room which looked abandoned as the fire started to die. He then pushed on the back of the portrait of the Fat Lady, making her mumble and open. He never noticed a pair of bright brown eyes follow the movements of the portrait.

Running along the corridors and evading Mrs Norris and a Ravenclaw prefect, he eventually reached the dungeons. Here, he hissed Open , opening a hidden path in the wall. He followed it and then went into another path which he opened with parseltongue too. Finally, he crept out from behind a tapestry and came to the low-ceilinged Slytherin Common room.

He went up the corridors until he came to the 2nd year Slytherin dorms. Entering silently, he passed the snoring forms of Crabbe and Goyle and eventually came to Malfoy.

‘*Silencio, Stupefy, Incarcerus, Agitabilis.*’ He cast silently, silencing the blonde boy and making sure he does not wake up or move. His final spell allowed him to move the Slytherin silently to a secret and secluded passageway nearby, which he closed behind him with a parseltongue hiss.

‘*Ennervate*’

“Hello Malfoy.” He said to the blonde, who looked at him in confusion, surprise and then started shouting without a sound coming out of his mouth and struggling against the magical bindings on his body.

“No need to struggle scum, there is no escape.” With those words, he cast charms to fool any magical detectors and to silence the general area. Then, he lifted the silencing charm on Malfoy.

“What is the meaning of this Potter?” snarled Malfoy.

“Oh Draco, haven’t you figured it out yet? I am so madly in love with you, that I brought you here to rape you...” he answered, blowing at the boy’s ear.

“Wha..”

“Now Drakie Poo, on to business, has Lucy Poo, your dada, been making any deals regarding big bad stuff happening at Hogwarts lately?”

“I have no idea what you are talk...”

“CRUCIO!” Harry cut short the blonde’s answer, and felt the satisfying rush of power fill him as he held the screaming boy under his curse. He felt mind clouding in a haze of happiness, and his lips moved to a coy smile as the blood pounded faster in his veins. His Hate for the pale boy fuelled his curse, as he remembered the atrocities Malfoy had committed, torturing members of the DA to death. Finally, he lifted the curse, which he had held for much longer than necessary.

“Wrong answer Drakie...now I shall ask again, did Daddy plan anything for Hogie-warts?”

Draco shivered, and did not answer, which earned him another bout of the cruciatus.

“I am getting impatient Drakie-Poo....”

“N..I don’t know anything...”

“CRUCIO!”

“He said...something...clear...mudbloods...”

“Good boy Drakie-Poo...now let’s have a peek into your mind shall we?” With those words, Harry unleashed legilimency barrage on the boy, smashing into his mind and collecting all the snippets of conversations that anything to do with the school.

“Draco, if I have my way, you will no longer be taught by that old fool...”

“...the school will only have those that deserve to be in it...not the mudbloods...”

“...the blood traitors will pay as well...”

“...the Dark Lord has entrusted me...with this task....”

Finally, Harry withdrew from the mind of the boy, which had now collapsed on the floor, unconscious.

Harry dragged him to the Common Room and threw him on the couch.

“Obliviate!”

The curse hit the boy, and Harry, under the invisibility cloak, made his way out of the Slytherin Dorms and on back up to Gryffindor Tower.

He moved into the Gryffindor tower, stepping into a puddle of water as he came in. He cursed silently and moved on towards the stairs, leaving wet footprints on his trail.

Before he could make it, someone grabbed the invisibility cloak, pulling it off him and tackled him.

“Hello Harry. What are you up to so late?” said a soft voice, and Harry turned to peer into the bright brown eyes of Ginny Weasley.

“Ginny?”

“I know my name Harry, now will you please answer my question?”

“I...was having a walk.”

"The truth Harry."

"That is the truth!"

"I may not be able to do Legilimency like you, but I know you are lying. You were up to something."

"Okay, so I was, what is it to you anyway? Are you my manager?" he spat back angrily.

"No need to snap at me Potter." Answered Ginny, a brief look of hurt passing through her eyes before her eyes turned steely cold.

Harry sighed. "Look Ginny, I'm sorry. Sometimes I need to do things on my own, no questions asked. I was gathering some information if you must know."

"Okay Harry." She said, her eyes softening "you can have your secrets like everybody else. But if you need anything, know that we will always be loyal to you...I will always be loyal to you."

"Thank you Ginny. That is much more than I could ask for, and certainly more than I deserve."

"You deserve much more than that Harry. Much, much more. Goodnight." She said, moving up the stairs.

Harry followed her form up the stairs before gathering his cloak, vanishing the water and going up to fall to his bed and into sweet dreams himself.

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Harry had just was just finishing lunch on the second day of school. He was one of the few 2nd-year Gryffindors still eating, as everyone else was excitedly waiting for Lockhart's defence class.

Wiping his mouth, Harry stood up only to face Dumbledore who was coming towards him.

"Professor." He acknowledged, his face set into an emotionless mask.

“Ahh Harry my bo..”

“Mr Potter please, unless you will allow me to call you Albus.” Said Harry.

“Oh, I would be elated if we talked on first name basis Harry!” said the old man, his twinkle on full blast.

“Well then Albus, what brings you here on this fine day?” said Harry, letting a chuckle escape while thinking about ways to turn his long white beard polka pink.

“Ah to the matter at hand. You see, we have been talking to the Dursley’s and we have hit upon a little snag.”

“A snag.” said Harry, his face returning to his emotionless mask.

“Yes, well, they seem to have somehow found out about the gold in the Potter Vault. They are trying to claim it due to being your guardians for 11 years. They are also saying we abducted you and put strange ideas into your mind.”

“I see. Thank you of informing me of this Albus. Do not concern yourself with this situation, I will be just fine.”

“Ahh...there is also another matter that you might like to know.”

Harry turned and looked at the headmaster.

“We have learned from our contacts within the Ministry that Sirius Black has been moved from Azkaban...though where he is we do not know. Crouch seems to have picked up on it and is causing an uproar.”

“Indeed.” Said Harry, his eyes not betraying the thoughts that passed through his mind. “It seems that important things have been set in motion at last. If I may be excused now Albus, I have to go to my class with Lockhart.”

“Professor Lockhart Harry.”



"If you want my opinion sir, he is a fraud. But I shall reserve my judgement for now. Good-day Headmaster." He said, walking off to the staircases.

He came to the class just before the bell signalling the beginning of the period rang.

Harry stared at Lockhart while the man that was probably responsible for the stupidity attributed to blondes gave self-glorifying commentary about himself.

"And now, I think we need a little test to see what you have read!" said the man cheerfully, flashing his disgusting smile and making lavender swoon.

Harry looked at the sheet that the man gave him and grinned as he began answering the questions.

1) What is Gilderoy Lockhart's favourite colour?

White, for it is the colour of the flash of photo-machines that he loves posing for

2) What is Gilderoy Lockhart's secret ambition?

To kill a flobberworm without wetting his pants from fear.

3) What, in your opinion, is Gilderoy Lockhart's greatest achievement to date?

Being born.

And so on until:

54) When is Gilderoy Lockhart's birthday, and what would his ideal gift be?

Probably on a date of no importance, and his ideal gift would be a brain. He really needs one.

In the end, Lockhart collected the papers. He started talking about them, disappointed in their inaccuracy and giving an elated Hermione

10 points. He paused when he read Harry's paper, and narrowed his eyes at him.

"Now Mr Potter, there is no reason for you to be insulting out of jealousy. 5 points from Gryffindor." he said, while Harry just smiled in response.

Lockhart moved to place a large covered cage on his desk.

"Now - be warned! It is my job to arm you against the foulest creatures known to wizardkind! You may find yourselves facing your worst fears in this room. Know only that no harm can befall you whilst I am here. All I ask is that you remain calm."

The class leaned forward apprehensively, and Lockhart put his hand on the cover

"I must ask you not to scream," he said in a low voice. "It might provoke them."

As the whole class held its breath, Lockhart whipped off the cover.

"Yes," he said dramatically. "Freshly caught Cornish pixies. "

The class seemed disappointed, and Seamus laughed, but was soon silenced by Lockhart.

"Well then, lets see how you fare against them!"

Lockhart finally opened the cage, and pandemonium erupted. Lockhart let loose a girlish scream when some of the pixies messed up his hair and most students sought refuge under the desk as the pixies smashed everything in sight.

"Peskipiksi Pesternomi!" shouted Lockhart, but it had no effect. A pixie just took his wand and chucked it out the window.

Finally, Harry waved his wand and, with a flash of blue light, all the pixies fell to the ground, stunned.

“Oh...eh...well done Mr Potter, 5 points to Gryffindor. I could have handled it of course, but I wanted to see how you would react to the situation.”

“Bullshit.” Said Harry in a voice that, though quiet, was easily heard by Lockhart. Hermione looked livid.

Just then, there was a mad rush to the exit as the bell signalling the end of the period sounded.

“Mr Potter, please do stay.” Said Lockhart as Harry moved to leave.

Once the class was empty, Lockhart moved towards Harry.

“Harry, Harry, Harry. Why must you be so jealous and difficult? I understand that you got your show of fame by guiding the aurors to the Lestranges, but you should not try blame me for not being as great as I...”

“I would advise you to be silent you fool, or I will send you were I sent your predecessor and Bellatrix Lestrangle, to the grave.” cut Harry.

“Now Harry, all idle threats will do is earn you a det..”

“Silence!” said Harry, his voice deepening until it sounded ethereal and demonic. The temperature in the room dropped dramatically and little icicles appeared on the window. Harry’s magic made the air around him pulsate vividly while his eyes glowed a menacing red. “Do not pass me for a fool Lockhart. You are a fraud, and if you cross me, all you will be good for is manure for the greenhouses!”

With those words, he stomped out of the room, leaving a pale Lockhart behind him.

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## Chapter 10 – Tendrils of Darkness

Harry Potter was amused.

Very amused.

For the fourth time that day, he had encountered professor Lockhart in the corridors. And, also for the forth time, the professor had promptly found some reason to scurry away.

It was ironic really. In his original timeline, Harry would spend his time avoiding Lockhart. Now, their roles were reversed, and for the past month since the destructive pixie lesson, the professor had barely spoken to Harry, and every time he had to address him in class, he did so as quickly as possible.

Hermione had, naturally, noticed this, and her incessant pestering had driven Harry half-mad, but he wisely chose to keep his mouth firmly closed with regards to the events that took place when everyone else had gone. Still, that did not stop Hermione's questions, nor did it stop him feeling an inner beast rise aggressively in response, which he barely contained. After all, hexing his friend for her questions hardly seemed appropriate. Even if something within him did not seem to agree with that.

Whatever it was though didn't complain to loudly, for he had several opportunities to hex people, which translated to hexing Malfoy. The blonde haired Slytherin did not take well to Harry repeatedly defeating him, and kept on trying to humiliate him in classes and ambush him in corridors. The latter made an excellent opportunity for field training in duelling for his friends.

He could clearly remember the first time that the Slytherins encountered the fury of the Shades.

***/Flashback/***

It was, as Fred Weasley put it, "Too bloody early in the bloody morning for a bloody Quidditch practice", though he made sure to whisper it, lest he be heard by the captain, Oliver Wood, who was currently showing the sleepy Gryffindor Quidditch team and the even

sleepier Shades his latest plans for winning the cup. Harry's friends were beginning to curse their decision to follow him on the first practice of the season.

Finally, after going through all of Wood's animated Diagrams, they got up and dragged their feet and brooms to the quidditch pitch. Naturally, as fate would have it, they were barely in the air before several people in green robes walked into the field, seven of them carrying finely polished broom-sticks in their hands.

Oliver bade his team to stop, and promptly landed.

"This is our practice time Flint. Get lost." He said, addressing the Slytherin Captain.

"I don't think so Wood." He answered, while at the same time landing a glare made him look like he would like nothing better than to break Wood's bones, an action which probably rated amongst the top 10 of his fantasies.

"You see," he continued, "I have expressed permission from Professor Snape" he said, waving a little piece of paper under Wood's nose "saying that the Slytherin team is to use the pitch today, in order to try out our new seeker."

"You have a new seeker? Who?" questioned George.

Flint simply gestured towards his players, who came forward. Six large people came over, leering at the Gryffindors. Their body mass betrayed that Flint's strategy revolved around slamming into opponents and on brute strength rather than skill. From behind the six large figures before them came a seventh, smaller boy, smirking all over his pale, pointed face. It was Draco Malfoy.

"Malfoy? A second year?" asked Wood, almost incredulous

"Indeed. Mr Malfoy made a rather significant contribution to our team." He said, and the entire team stuck out their brooms. On them, the writing *Nimbus Two Thousand and One* was clearly visible. "Nimbus, Very latest model. Only came out last month."

“So Malfoy, had Daddy buy your way into the team did you?” asked Ginny, sneering at the boy.

“At least my father does not need to whore off his daughter to Potter and Longbottom to get some scraps of money...tell me, do you team up with the mudblood?” Asked the pale boy.

At that moment, an extreme feeling of rage, anger and hate rose through Harry like a tidal wave, drowning his mind in a feeling of euphoria and blinding him. Before he noticed what he was doing, his wand was already pointing at Malfoy, the words “Avada Kedavra” ready in his mouth.

At the last minute, he suppressed the feeling with great difficulty. Looking at Malfoy, he saw that he had already fallen unconscious, his face laced with green boils and his hair cut off as a result of a combined attack by Ron, Neville and Ginny. Around them, Hermione and the Gryffindor team had also taken their wands out, and were pointing them firmly at the Slytherins, who had lined up against the Gryffindors, wands at the ready, glaring at them.

“He went asking for it Flint” said Oliver tiredly.

“Did he? That isn’t what we saw... an unprovoked attack on our newest seeker to sabotage him...I never thought you would do that Wood.”

“I don’t think you are getting the facts straight Flint...perhaps you need some first-hand experience of an attack to understand...” said Harry.

“Really Potter? And I suppose you would be the one to show me?”

“Only one way to know isn’t there?” said Harry, smiling in a way he knew would infuriate Flint and keeping his bubbling anger suppressed at the same time.

“Are you threatening me?” said Flint, his gaze darkening.

Harry smiled again, and waving his wand, he conjured a few dozen shining knives, which remained suspended in the air in front of him.

“You fancy becoming a pin cushion Flint?”

The Slytherin glared, and one of Malfoy’s second year lackeys fired a spell from her wand. Before it could reach the Gryffindors, it was promptly stopped by Hermione, who slammed a shield into place. Then, all Hell broke loose.

The Gryffindor and Slytherin teams started throwing hexes at each other, while Harry’s friends took the offensive against Malfoy’s friends. Even though the hexes that the older Slytherins cast were fairly dark in nature, the Gryffindors managed to remain unscathed thanks to Harry, who covered his team-mates with well placed and powerful shields.

The second and first years that accompanied the team were made short work of by the Shades, who, casting some of the more recent spells that Harry taught them, made short work of them. When Harry gazed over, they were all disarmed, half of them on the ground recovering from jinxes, while Crabbe and Goyle were hexed into laughing uncontrollably.

Professor McGonagall picked that moment to walk into the pit, assigning all of them detentions on the next day. Still, the victory over the Slytherins, news of which soon travelled around the school, brightened the day for the Gryffindors.

***/End Flashback/***

Harry had trained his friends almost every night since then, but there were, unexpectedly, few complaints about the schedule. Hermione was always eager to learn, so her lack of resistance was understandable. What was more interesting was that Ginny absorbed his every word and worked extra hard to out-do her brother, who still complained about her intruding. In response, Ron worked harder to stay ahead of her. Neville, not wanting to be the only one left behind and still remembering how easily Quirrel bound him, put an effort in as well.

The constant clashes with the Slytherins had earned them a few detentions initially, but soon Harry changed their tactics into more subtle and offensive ones. When the Slytherins would corner them,

they smiled and feigned innocence, taking steps not to hex them. Later though, under the guise of Harry's and Neville's invisibility cloaks, they made silent hit and run attacks on isolated younger Slytherins or small groups of Malfoy's friends. The silent war that they had begun was more effective, and scarier, their tactics living up to their group's namesake.

The Shades were causing more trouble for Malfoy than the twins and the marauders combined could ever have.

Harry had even contacted Fred and George for help, and as a result, most second-year Slytherins had gotten used to arriving for breakfast with their clothes, skin and hair in various colours and textures.

Tension between Gryffindor and Slytherin was at an all time high, and small scuffles had erupted amongst the older students as well. Harry and Neville were prime targets, so they were usually surrounded by their friends and other Gryffindors, like the twins and, much to Neville's horror, Colin.

This was also the reason why it was a fairly large group of Gryffindors entered a rather full great hall that morning, moving over to their table and sitting down at their usual places.

Ron spotted Malfoy smirking at them and frowned.

"What is he so happy about?"

"Whatever it is, I'd bet it isn't good for us." Said Neville.

Indeed. It seemed that most of the attention from the second-year part of the Slytherin table was focused their way, which was disconcerting.

"Ignore them." Said Hermione "They are all just.." but she was cut short when the salad in-front of them exploded, and three Asps appeared. The snakes immediately slithered towards them, and launched themselves against a stunned Ginny before anyone could react.

*Stop* hissed Harry at the snakes.



They stopped and looked at him curiously, along with every witch and wizard in hearing range.

A spell coming from behind Harry vanished the snakes. Turning around, Harry saw Professor McGonagall, looking at him with an odd mixture of confusion, puzzlement and apprehension.

Harry turned back to his food, preparing to eat as though he didn't have the entire hall staring at him. Before he could do so, he was suddenly grabbed by Ron and Neville, who pulled him up and silently motioned for them to get out of the hall. They left, Hermione and Ginny following them promptly.

Resigned, he let his friends take him away from the commotion of the crowd of students, and into an empty classroom on the next floor.

Then, the interrogation began.

"You're a parselmouth?" asked Ron, a hint of accusation in his tone.

"Yes Ron, I am." answered Harry calmly. He looked at Neville, who looked at him in the eyes and nodded. Harry immediately understood what the boy was going to do.

"He's not the only one. I'm one too."

Harry could have sworn he heard a snap as three heads simultaneously turned to look at Neville.

"You're...one...too?" asked Hermione, disbelievingly. While at the same time Ron and Ginny exclaimed "What?"

I think we're scaring them a bit Nev hissed Harry, enjoying the stares that his friends gave him

It seems almost cruel to have them there...not knowing a thing we say

I think it got to their heads now... "So..convinced?" said Harry with a smile.

"It is widely regarded that parselmouths are evil." said Hermione hesitantly.

"A myth that came about because Moldy-Voldy was a snake speaker."

"You-know-who was not the only dark wizard that was a parselmouth." Said Ginny "The entire line of Slytherin has the trait, and they have always been known for their...attempts to eliminate muggles."

"Runs in the family...in fact, I wouldn't be surprised if old Sal made some sort of spell that made everyone in his family go loony and get an urge to kill muggles...he would be ashamed if he knew Voldemort" here he noticed the cringe, even if it was reduced "was a half-blood. Anyway, Neville and I are in no way related to the Slytherin bloodline."

"Are you sure? After all he lived over a thousand years ago..." said Hermione.

"Well, I'm definitely not evil, nor do I feel any sudden urges for violence and killing muggles." Said Harry confidently. Then he leaned in, and said in a not-so-silent whisper "Though you have to watch out for Neville, I saw him squashing an ant the other day...you know how it is, squashing ants now, being a dark lord tomorrow"

"OI!" said Neville, while the others just laughed, the sombre mood broken.

"How come you never told us?" asked Ron when the group prepared to go to their classes.

"It's not really that important...and we weren't sure how you would take it." Said Neville. "Now that the whole school knows about Harry..."

"Oh don't worry...I'm sure it'll blow over soon...nobody really cares about these things anymore...You-Know-Who is far in the past" said Hermione.

“Don’t be so sure about him.” Mumbled Harry.

“What?”

“Remember Quirrell? The dark lord is still out there...always plotting...biding his time.”

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Not much attention was paid to the incident. Indeed, Harry got many strange looks, particularly from the teachers, but to most of the student population, parseltongue was a myth, a story that more than half of them barely knew, and even less cared about it.

Since there was no basilisk or heir of Slytherin to terrorise the school population, Harry did not have to endure a lot of whispers when he walked down the hallway, though he still had a lot of attention focused on him, due to his powerful displays of magic.

September rolled onto October, and the days passed fairly quickly until the month had all but ended. As Halloween decorations were being finalised on the night of October 30th, the shades were in the middle of their nightly training session.

“Expelliarmus. Expelliarmus. EXPELLIARMUS. Damn it Ginny, can’t you say still for a minute?” said Ron, while Ginny was simply dancing away from his weak disarming hexes.

“Ginny, if you keep on dodging everything, you’ll wear down fast.” Said Hermione.

Harry, who was watching the action from afar decided to step in. “You might want to use a shield for the weaker hexes Gin.”

“But my shield is too weak! I’m only 11, I can’t raise a strong one.”

“Maybe not, but it’s not like Ron’s spells are very powerful either. If you both practice, you’ll get stronger with time.” Then, Harry turned to Ron, ignoring Ginny’s loud complaints about how evading was better and blocking was for lazy fat people.

"I think you've got down the disarming spell...even if you need to work on power and speed. Now how about we try something else?" he leaned in and whispered to the redhead's ear, who then looked at Ginny with a gleeful smirk.

"Premaculeus!"

A light purple spell made its way towards Ginny, who immediately jumped to the left. However, to her surprise, the spell suddenly changed direction, swerving off and hitting her directly in the chest. She let out a yelp of pain and fell on the floor, scratching herself furiously as her skin acquired a slight red tinge.

"Medeor Exsecror." Mumbled Harry over the fallen girl, who then immediately jumped up and shouted.

"What are you doing?"

"A lesson my dear, to remember that while dodging is good, it is not enough. Don't worry though, that spell is not easily performed, and will be stopped by a weak shield. As will any other homing spell. Now, let's try again shall we?"

"Premaculeus!"

"Protego" a weak looking shield flickered around the child, but it was enough to stop the spell coming towards her, even if a few beads of sweat came to her face as she held the shield up.

"Now let's get some new duelling spells down shall we?" asked Harry, turning around and walking to one of the nearby books that the room of requirement had so graciously provided. Doing so, he didn't notice Ginny pointing her wand at him and muttering. "Premaculeus"

A thin pink beam made its way towards Harry, hitting him square in the back, sending him to his knees, a slight irritation spreading over his skin. He took out his wand and waved it over him. Then, he turned back towards Ginny, smiling.

"Well Gin, hitting people in the back? Who on earth taught such an brilliant underhanded manoeuvre?"

“Oh, I had the best teacher! He is the greatest wizard I know, and he is so talented...though he is such an arrogant jerk and a git..no...he isn't someone you would like to know really.” Said Ginny playfully.

“Oh really?”

“Yes...big prat and all...he keeps on teaching me to win by any means necessary...you wouldn't like the bloke I'm sure. Plus, it's not like he's that good at duelling. I could beat him with ease.”

“Are you sure of that Miss Weasley?” said Harry with a glint in his eye.

“Why yes. I believe it is just now that the great Harry Potter was on his knees, and I was victorious.” Moving closer until she was standing very close to him, she continued. “In fact, I think that I'm going to win again! Expelliarmus!”

The sudden spell, inches from Harry, hit him before he could raise a shield, and any other method of getting away would have been...painful...for the caster. And it wouldn't be a good idea to send Ginny to the hospital wing.

“I win again Potter!” said Ginny victoriously, and began a little dance around the room, carrying his wand like a trophy. “That should teach you to dodge!”

Harry just waved his hand, and Ginny hung upside down in the air, her robes falling on her head, exposing her underwear.

“PUT ME DOWN NOW POTTER!” she shouted, livid, while the others started laughing. Harry laughed with the others. *‘Its fun to be a child...especially one with magic.’*

She fell to the ground with a pang. Getting up, she whirled towards Harry.

“Bogeus! Conjuctus! **Immobulus!** Lentitudo!”

Harry waved his hand again, conjuring a powerful shield that blocked all the hexes.

"You can't beat me Gin."

"Really? Who was the one that fell, and lost his wand?"

"I let you do that."

"Right...I'm sure. Admit it Potter, I won."

"Did not."

"Did to."

"Did not."

Before they could go further, they were interrupted by Hermione.

"That's all very nice, but I think we should be getting back to learning spells."

"Oh fine...here....a very nice Inca Protection charm...a curse that will temporarily make someone deaf...and an overpowered variation of the Lumos spell to blind the enemy...right, lets start."

"That sounds to hard!" complained Ron.

"Well, you don't have to learn it. But I am sure that Ginny would like to use it on you as practice before she casts it on Malfoy....right Gin?"

"Certainly." She smirked, looking at Ron evilly.

Ron backed away. The last time his sister had that look, he woke up with spiders in his clothes.

After they had a fairly exhausting night, which involved Ron's hair turning pink, Ginny defeating Hermione in a long duel hailed by the others and the Shades planting their own 'special' form of celebrations for Halloween, they decided to finally go to the comfort of their beds.

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Harry laughed as he watched another pair of students being chased by the gigantic Jack o'Lanterns, courtesy of Gorge and Fred. Naturally, in Harry's completely unbiased opinion, said pumpkins were nothing compared with the wraiths that the Shades had enchanted.

Still, the spirit of fun was spread around the school, and Harry decided that the day was too nice to spoil by picking fights with the Slytherins.

"Though Malfoy is just begging to be hit by a pumpkin." Mumbled Ron.

Harry chuckled and nudged Ron's shoulder, pointing at Fred, George and Ginny who seemed to be plotting something in relation to the blond haired 2nd year that was currently bragging about some family exploit to his audience.

It was not long before Malfoy's bloated head was covered with a pumpkin, causing glares from the Slytherins and Snickers from everyone that saw the scene.

"Well, some people cause happiness wherever they go. Others, whenever they go. I don't think I have to point out which of the two Malfoy is do I?" said Harry, looking at the livid pumpkin-covered boy.

As the evening rolled on and the people prepared for the feast, Harry decided to slip away.

"But you can't miss the feast mate! They have the best food!" exclaimed Ron, while Ginny rolled her eyes at her Brother's obsession with gobbling down large amounts of food.

"I'm not really that hungry...and I have some...matters to take care of." Said Harry non-committedly. *'After all, since everyone will be at the feast, it will be the perfect opportunity to get out of this castle and take care of my dear relatives...and restock on some supplies.'*

"What matters?" asked the bushy haired witch next to him.

"Just something...it's a private thing Hermione."

Despite the mixed complaints and curiosity of his friends, Harry Potter could be found sneaking stealthily across the Hogwarts Grounds while the students were congregating in the Great Hall, in preparation for a nice feast.

As soon as he made it safely out of the grounds, Harry wrapped his cloak tighter around him and apparated to Diagon Alley.

Harry's power had grown a fair bit since he first arrived in this world. He took advantage of having two magical cores, and his constant use of powerful magics and rituals meant that his second core had to work hard to catch up with the first, which meant that his total magical muscle was very well trained.

That did not mean that he had reached his full potential. Far from it. He knew he had a long way to go before he could safely beat a wizard of the power that Voldemort or Dumbledore held. And he had learnt the hard way that relying on his dumb luck tended to get people close to him killed.

And he wasn't about to let anyone jump in front of curses for him. At least, not anyone close to him...

After purchasing various ingredients that, according to his calculations at least, would cost him a fine of 10,000 galleons and a 2 year vacation in Azkaban if found, he made his way towards Gringotts.

He headed to the nearest teller and asked to meet Brandok, the goblin in charge of the Black Estate. Soon, he was moving through the twisting tunnels, until he came to the now familiar office.

"Greeting Brandok." Said Harry in Gobbledegook to Brandok.

"Mr Potter. I assume you are here in relation to Lord Black?"

"Indeed. I am aware that he had been finally taken out of that horrid prison, but the Ministerial Bureaucracy seems to be...lacking in its efficiency of handling the matter."



“As you know, Fudge is using the case as political ammunition against Crouch. However, he will not move without conclusive evidence, or this could potentially backfire on him. He has already taken a great risk by moving him out of that prison.” said the elderly Goblin.

“Yes...unfortunately, the nature of the Wizarding Courts seems to follow, in this case at least, the motto ‘Guilty until proven innocent.’ It seems that our dear minister has delusions of adequacy.”

“Well Mr Potter. We are trying our best to gather evidence with regards to Mr Black’s innocence, but what we have until now is too circumstantial to be used effectively in this situation. In a normal court, it would be enough to guarantee Lord Black’s freedom...but you know what the case is like. Capturing the animagus, Pettigrew, would be our best choice at the moment...though the option presents us with significant difficulties.”

“It is possible that he has attempted to keep in contact with the wizarding world by acting as a pet for a family” offered Harry “Or, he could have hidden with the Lestranges. It is possible that we could find something in a hideaway...I do believe they must have had one in Wales, in order to bring down the Longbottom Wards.” said Harry.

“We have come to a similar conclusion. However, that does not make it much easier. The Lestranges were never found, and even after their capture, their hideout remains hidden. We are nonetheless trying...”

“The attack on my family occurred after the fall of the dark lord...there might have been someone who my parents confided in...”

“And they haven’t come forward this far?”

“They may be dead...If I am correct, you have searched the Potter vaults, as I gave you permission to do a few months ago?”

“That is correct Mr Potter. Yet, we found nothing pertaining to the case.”

“Tell me...did the Longbottoms have a secret keeper?”

“No...they were preparing to cast the charm, but did not have an adequate amount of time.”

“Is it possible that my parents shared the information of Pettigrew being the secret keeper with them, seeing as they were the other members of the order whom the prophesy concerned?”

“That is...a possibility” said the Goblin “But if you desire to search the Longbottom vaults, you will have to speak to Mrs Longbottom.”

“Indeed. Now Brandok...lets move onto some other matters...”

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After an hour of talking with the goblin, Harry left the bank feeling his mind hurt. He knew very well that goblins were shrewd negotiators, and his talk with Brandok had proved that. He rather admired the ruthless efficiency with which the goblins operated, so every visit he made to the bank included an attempt to further his ties with them and create a possible alliance. Gringotts had enough economic power to rival the ministry's political might...and Harry was never a fan of the ministry. They tended to get in the way of his plans. A goblin revolution, with his support, would serve as an excellent blow against it.

Harry snapped out of these thoughts as he walked into the dark and deserted streets. Concentrating, he felt a squeezing sensation, and found himself in privet drive. He started waving his wand and mumbling, disabling the magical detectors focused on the area. He then made his way towards his uncle's house, to have a little talk with them.

Once there, he knocked on the door.

He could swear that he could hear a voice saying “Bloody salesmen...interrupting perfectly good folk in their dinner time.”

The door swerved open, and Vernon Dursley's face appeared.

“Well what do you...BOY! What are YOU doing here?”

“Good evening Dursley” said Harry coldly, stepping inside and walking to the kitchen where Petunia and Dudley were having their dinner.

“Hello aunt, cousin.”

“What do you want here boy? Are you here finally to give us what we deserve? Keeping a mountain of gold hidden in some freak place while honest folk like us sweat to provide you...” started Vernon

“That will be enough Dursley.”

“Don’t you talk like that to me boy!”

“I am indeed here to give you what you deserve.”

“The money? You have it with you?” said Petunia, a gleam entering into her eye.

“No...it is something rather...different.” said Harry, pulling out his wand and pointing it at the family, who had now visibly paled several degrees.

“Don’t point that...that thing at us!” said his uncle, trying to appear in control “You aren’t allowed to use magic outside of school!”

“No-one will ever know...” said Harry, and, deciding to play around with their minds a bit, added “The police will find your corpses tomorrow...charred by an unfortunate house fire...what a tragedy...”

The Dursley’s paled even more.

“Or...I could make you do whatever I want Vernon...I can imagine the headlines tomorrow ‘Mad Man Butchers Wife and Son...’” he continued, inwardly laughing at the reaction of his relatives.

*‘It almost makes me regret that all I’m going to do is change their memories...’*

“Or even better....’Cannibal Son Roasts and Eats Parents...” said Harry, who now almost collapsed in gales of laughter when he saw the expressions on their faces.

“You...freak!” shouted Vernon “You will meet your end just like your good for nothing freak parents!”

At this, Harry’s smile and laughter disappeared, and, before he could control himself or even understand what he was doing, Vernon was writhing under the cruciatus curse. For a few moments, Harry just stood there dazed, Vernon screaming, his mind in a haze of pleasure. He watched the events like an outsider, unable to comprehend what was going on. Finally, what he was doing sunk in, and he immediately broke the curse.

No-one spoke for a few moments; Vernon lay panting on the floor, Petunia and Dursley frozen on their chairs, and Harry standing silent, seemingly in some form of trance. Finally, he felt a mental nudge as his anti-detection spells began to wear off, and he spoke, knowing he now had little time left.

“Well, I must say this little family reunion has been entertaining, but I must leave. Obliviate, Obliviate, Obliviate!” He said, pointing his wand in succession to each of his relatives, erasing memories of his visit and of his inheritance.

He walked rapidly out of the house, making sure that he was as far away so as to not cause suspicion, before apparating back to the grounds outside the Hogwarts wards.

He breathed in the cool Scottish air, and looked at the sky, where he could see Mars and Venus rising on the horizon. His mind still felt slightly misty from his meeting with his relatives, so he spent a few moments gazing out into the sky trying to clear it.

Eventually, he walked up to the castle, still deep in thought about the Dursleys before noticing the unusual darkness. The feast was over, he was expecting that, but it being a celebration, the students should have been allowed to stay out later...unless...

All thoughts of fat and ugly relatives forgotten, he now broke into a silent run, quickly entering the castle.

It was dark and eerily silent. He marched up the staircase in the entrance hall, before moving right into the magical staircases. After impatiently having to wait until they got into the proper position, he reached the second floor corridor.

He entered it, his steps echoing silently against the stone floor, while he felt his heart beating hard.

A few torches faintly illuminated the area. He walked towards Moaning Myrtle's bathroom and he squinted. In the flickering light he could see very clearly his worst fears conformed. On the wall, written in blood, was a simple, yet terrifying message.

*The Chamber of Secrets has been opened*

*Enemies of the heir, beware*

Harry froze, staring dumbly at the wall, before feeling a hand gripping his shoulder. He was abruptly pulled around, and came face to face with Snape who, strangely, did not look gleeful to have caught Harry, but rather had a stony expression.

"Back to the scene of the crime Mr Potter? 30 points from Gryffindor for being out of bounds. Now, you will have to come with me. The headmaster wishes to speak with you"

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Hehehe....

This update took longer than what I would have liked...but exams and waves of bad weather that knock out the power tend to do that...

Oh well...please review...

## Chapter 11 – Serpentine Whispers

If any Hufflepuff first year would chance being in the second floor corridor on this night, they would have certainly screamed when they saw what looked like a greasy haired vampire striding their way, a victorious and yet weary look in his eye.

Assuming they didn't run as fast as they could, they would have seen the figure of Severus Snape pass by, robes billowing behind him, followed closely by a Harry Potter, who, even if his face did not betray it, had millions of thoughts running through his mind.

Finally, the duo approached a stone gargoyle.

"Fire Mints." All but growled Snape.

The stone gargoyle jumped aside, revealing a spiral staircase.

"Go in Potter, I will inform the headmaster of your arrival, try not to break anything while you are in there."

*'Right...whatever you say you arse-bandit...I'll just wait for the balmy old man to come over...whatever he was doing at this time...'*

Harry moved swiftly up the staircase and silently opened the oak door, entering the headmaster's circular office. He glanced into the dark night sky outside the window, staring for a few seconds at the pale full moon.

A sound from his left captured his attention, and he turned to look at Fawkes, regarding him oddly from his golden perch.

"Hello Fawkes." Said Harry smiling, moving closer and raising a hand to stroke the phoenix.

The bird then trilled, the phoenix song echoing around the room. Harry pulled back as he felt something unknown, very deep within him clench in pain.

He examined the area around him, his eyes scanning the portraits who feigned, rather unsuccessfully, a deep sleep. Finally, he saw the

sorting hat lying on a nearby shelf. He picked it up and placed it on his head.

*'Hello Albion'* he called in his mind

*'I was wondering when you would come speak to me Mr Potter...I must commend you on the mind shields you have erected...Even I cannot pass them beyond what you allow, something that I considered impossible until now.'*

*'The same old Albion as ever I see'* answered Harry, thinking wistfully about the same hat that had given him much crucial advice about the founder's personal effects and possible horcruxes.

*'You still haven't told me about that.'*

*'Oh, let's say a little hatty told me...'*

*'I certainly don't remember telling you.'*

*'Ah...but you see, it was not in this reality. Now, before I go on, please remember that you are bound to all magical heirs to never reveal what they tell you.'*

*'You are no heir Mr Potter...I scan everyone when I sort them, and believe me, while you have some powerful blood in you, you do not descend from any of the four.'*

*'By blood, perhaps not, but I suggest you scan my aura.'*

Soon, the hat did just that.

*'By Merlin...Slytherin! I sense most dark magic being responsible for making you a magical heir Mr Potter...perhaps you would care to explain?'* Said the hat with an edge of steel in its voice.

*'Perhaps seeing is better...'* said Harry, allowing the hat entry into his mind.

He soon felt the Hat search through his memories, moving rapidly through his life.

*‘Very...interesting Mr Potter.’*

*‘I trust you understand that you are bound not to reveal any of this information?’*

*‘Your secrets are safe. Though I must warn you that not all is as it seems...I suggest you look into your self and into your magic.’*

Just as the hat said those words, Harry heard the door opening, and Professor Dumbledore, followed by McGonagall and Snape, entered the room.

“Greetings Professors.” Said Harry politely, while placing the Hat back on the self. He looked at their faces. Dumbledore looked almost weary, the twinkle in his eyes missing. McGonagall’s jaw was set, but Harry could sense a mixture of nervousness and concern pouring off her. Snape displayed no emotion, but beneath his mask, there was a hint of apprehension.

“Mr Potter.” Said the elderly Headmaster, sitting down on his chair. “You do know why you are here I suppose?”

“I’m afraid I don’t Headmaster.”

“What were you doing outside at this time Potter?” snarled Snape.

“Walking.”

“Walking Mr Potter.? Why were you outside your dormitory at this time? In fact, where have you been all evening?” Asked Dumbledore, whilst his gaze examined Harry like an x-ray machine.

“As I told you headmaster, I was walking. As for the time, I was not aware that we had to return to our dormitories earlier than planned...If you made an announcement, I’m afraid it did not reach me.”

“And where were you?” asked McGonnagal

“Walking.”



“You’ve already told us that Potter! Why were you ‘walking’ when everyone else was attending the feast? And everybody left the feast, only to find your handiwork on Filch’s cat! And the writing on that wall! Thought you might play a prank like your irresponsible father Potter?” said Snape

“I’m afraid I have no clue what you are talking about Professor.”

“Do you claim that you have no knowledge of the events that occurred tonight?” asked McGonagall.

“As I have already told you, I was walking. I don’t know anything.”

“Mr Filch’s cat was found petrified...by dark magic nonetheless...and the message you saw was written in blood on the wall. Why were you over there Mr Potter?” asked the Headmaster.

“All the water in the area and a message written in blood are not easy to miss. I was wondering why the school was suddenly empty, so I looked around.”

“You still haven’t explained to us why you were ‘walking’ instead of going to the feast.” said the potions master

Harry sank back in his chair. His face suddenly showed lines of weariness that were not normal for a 12-year old child. Then, with a slight tremor in his voice, he answered.

“Do you know the significance of this day Professor?”

“Yes, it’s Halloween Potter, but I don’t see how...” started Snape

“The significance for me.” Cut in Harry. “Do you remember the events that took place 11 years ago?”

“The death of your Parents.” Replied McGonagall, her look turning solemn.

Most people knew of that. Barely a week after the defeat of the Dark Lord, the world was stunned by the brutal murder of the Potters. The public never learnt who was responsible, but the outcry from the

murder, along with the thirst for revenge after Voldemort's fall, resulted in one of the greatest dark wizard hunts of the century. Crouch was in the middle of this, and had it not been for his son's and wife's mysterious deaths a month later, he would have been Minister.

"You expect us to believe that Potter? You were off mourning your parent's death?" said Snape.

"I couldn't bear going to that feast today. For me it marks the death of the only people who ever truly loved me, as well as a beginning of 10 years of living amongst people who wanted to 'beat' my freakiness out of me, 10 years of living in the cupboard under the stairs, 10 years of **absolute Hell!**" said Harry, his voice rising and his words laced with anger, while at the same time he looked directly into the Headmaster's eyes, giving him a look that plainly said 'And it's all your fault'.

Harry almost relished the guilt and sadness that was visible in the Headmaster's deep blue eyes. Snape however took no notice this silent interaction and started talking.

"It seems that Potter is not telling us the whole story. I am loath to believe the reasons he gives...he is just like his father, playing horrible pranks for his amusement...I think we need some severe punishment...perhaps a removal from the Quidditch team..."

"We will not remove him from the Quidditch team!" rose McGonagall to Harry's defence. "Albus!" she called, turning towards the headmaster.

"Innocent until proven guilty Severus." Said the Headmaster, while his contemplative and sorrowful gaze examined Harry.

"But Headmaster!" started Snape, but was soon cut by a voice behind him.

"Mr Potter is not responsible for the attack Professor Snape."

Everyone turned towards the voice, their gazes meeting the sorting hat.

“I can guarantee it. I have looked into his mind headmaster, and though he has the power to do this magic, he is innocent.”

Harry felt a wave of relief at the hat supporting him, even though he expected it. After all, he was a magical heir, and they were fighting on the same side! Or at least, against the person who wanted to capture Hogwarts.

Gazing back at the Headmaster, Harry caught a brief glimpse of a relieved face, before Dumbledore said:

“As you can see Severus, young Mr Potter here is not related to the attack. However Harry, I must express my concern about the path you are taking. Dark Magic is by its nature addictive and...”

“Headmaster.” Cut in Harry. “I understand that the power channelled through ones body by the dark arts tends to...cloud the connection between will and the magical core, there are ways to secure that connection so that it is not affected, and I have taken my measures.”

It was true after all. Early on in his earlier world, Harry had made sure to connect his mind to his core in a way that would allow him to always be in control, rather than lose the power of his will like other dark wizards. Just as his core was transferred into the new world, so was this connection.

“Very well Mr Potter.” Said the Headmaster “I think that you should be going now, I am certain your friends await you most anxiously.”

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Hogwarts was filled with whispers for the next two weeks, and Harry noticed many glances thrown his way, as well as many of the younger students running off when they saw him.

Naturally, the Shades and most of the Gryffindors stood firmly beside him when people started spreading the rumour that he was the Heir of Slytherin. Harry tried to dispel these rumours, even though a part of him liked the fear in other people's eyes, but, no matter how good he was at persuasion, many people still believed that he was behind the attack.

For second and first-year Gryffindors however, being somehow related to Harry's group meant attention and popularity, which meant that the Shades soon acquired an outer core of lower-year Gryffindors that would often be with them.

His friends put him through the Inquisition to find out where he was, but Harry just kept on repeating to them that he had something personal to take care of, until they gave up frustrated.

One good thing that resulted from the attack was that the Shades training time increased. Harry happily gave them all a rather different and more complete version of the legend that was the Chamber of Secrets than the one Hermione managed to worm out of Professor Binns four days after the incident.

"I'm telling you mate, it's Malfoy. You should have seen him when he saw the message, he was jumping with glee, saying how all the mudbloods would die!" Said Ron as the Shades were leaving the Room of Requirement on the night of the 5th of November.

"I doubt that Malfoy has any Slytherin blood in him...I'd bet that, if you looked back far enough, you'd find that his family is Hufflepuffs or something." Answered Harry.

"I'm sure he knows something though." Said Neville "He certainly knew about the chamber legend, and his father was involved with You-Know-Who..."

"Trust me...he is not behind the attack, nor knows who is...and NO Hermione, we are not going to use polyjuice to sneak in the Slytherin dorms" said Harry, cutting off Hermione, whose mouth had opened.

The girl had tried, since morning, to convince her comrades to use polyjuice and spy on Malfoy, but Harry had stopped them, saying it was unnecessary.

"Well then, since you seem know so much, who is it?" She said, stung.

"Voldemort." He answered, sending shivers down the spines of the Gryffindors around him.

“But You-Know-Who...”

“Call him Voldemort Ron.” Cut in Harry.

“I can’t do that!”

“Honestly Ron!” said Ginny “Harry, V..Vo.Voldemort is gone, so how is he orchestrating the attacks?”

“He is not as gone as you might hope...as for how... I think I have some ideas...but I’m not sure yet.”

“Why don’t you share them with us Harry?” pouted Ginny.

Harry sighed. “Voldemort fears death, probably more than anything else. I mean, his name means flight from death for Merlin’s sake!”

“Yes...that makes sense, but what does that have to do with the attacks?”

“To stop death, he sought immortality in dark soul magic. He split his own soul into pieces, putting each shard in an object, creating what is known as a Hoxcrux, and Hermione, you won’t find anything about these in the library, it is banned magic.”

“So by splitting his soul...he managed to become...immortal?” said Neville, a hint of fear in his voice.

“As long as the Hoxcruxes remain intact, yes. Now, as to the attacks, I think that one of the Hoxcruxes is here, in Hogwarts, possessing one of the students to do its bidding.”

“Are you sure Harry? I mean, it sounds interesting, but how can you be so sure?”

“I just know Hermione, you’ll have to trust me on this.”

“But...” started the bushy-haired girl.

“If Harry says he’s sure, then he has a reason. You’ll have to trust him like the rest of us Hermione.” said Ginny, with a fire in her eyes.

Hermione had nothing to answer with, and simply accepted the situation as she followed the others back to the Gryffindor tower.

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It was the first Quidditch match of the Season, Gryffindor vs Slytherin, and Harry was more than ready to completely embarrass Malfoy.

The Quidditch match was being discussed by everyone, mainly due to it being the climax of the unofficial war between Gryffindor and Slytherin that had already sent various students in the hospital wing.

After gobbling down the last pieces of bacon on his plate, he got up to head towards the changing rooms, whilst receiving encouraging pats on the back by the Shades, and fearful glances by many students.

“Sow dos Slydeins wat u got mte” said Ron, happily munching on an apple pie while Hermione and Ginny through the red-head disgusted looks.

“Harry, I’ve placed bet that you’ll either get the snitch in under 15 minutes or Malfoy will end up in the Hospital wing, so you know what to do, right?” said Ginny.

“For you Gin, I’ll make sure both happen.” answered Harry chuckling, and sprinted off to get ready for the game.

After going through Captain Wood’s pep talk which involved a large board with illustrations, the Gryffindor team came out to the roaring crowd in the Quidditch pitch.

Under Hooch’s inspection, the two team Captains, Wood and Flint, shook hands, though it looked more like they were trying to break each other’s hand.

With the blow of a whistle, the two teams were in the air.

Malfoy started tailing Harry, who scanned the nearby area and immediately went into a steep dive, Malfoy following.

The attention of the Crowds was immediately focused on the two seekers, while many followed their line of sight, trying to see the snitch and missing Gryffindor's first goal..

Harry was at his Nimbus's maximum speed, but Malfoy's superior broomstick easily kept up with him, and closed the distance between the two.

Then, a few meters above the ground, Harry stopped his dive and veered off to the left. Malfoy, having no such luck or skill, crashed into the ground. When he stood up, his robes were torn and his nose bleeding heavily.

The blonde boy got back on his broom, and flew up to Harry, vengeance in his eyes.

Still, as the match progressed, Malfoy ended up crashing into the ground and the stands another five times, while also colliding with two of his team-mates who were about to score.

Finally, 12 minutes after the game started, both boys saw the Snitch on the other side of the pitch, by one of the Slytherin beaters.

They sped towards it, Harry in the lead but Malfoy closing the distance right on his tail.

The beater saw Harry coming towards the Snitch, and sent a bludger right towards him. The crowds gasped as Harry seemingly went for a head-on collision with the bludger, but at the last moment the boy rolled on under his broom with one hand before jumping on from the other side. The bludger passed over him by mere inches, hitting Malfoy directly in the face.

The Slytherin didn't have time to understand what happened before a crunch was heard as his skull cracked and he fell to the ground, leaving Harry alone to catch the snitch and end the match 180-40 for Gryffindor.

Harry landed amidst a jubilant Gryffindor crowd, who had forgotten all about the Chamber and celebrated their victory.

He was soon engulfed in a mass hug by all the Shades and his team, as the students started getting out of the stadium. Before leaving, they saw a crowd congregating around the fallen Malfoy.

As Lockhart approached the scene, Harry grinned.

“Let me handle it!” said the smiling professor, “I’ve handled head wounds for ages!”

He waved his wand over the unconscious boy, and the Slytherins glared at him as Malfoy’s head was turned into a strange glob, with blond hair sprouting out at odd angles.

Harry fell into hysterical laughter.

“Well Gin” he said, pulling the girl into a one-armed hug “It looks like you won your bet...in the best way possible if I may say so.”

“It’s only natural.” said Ginny smiling “I bet on you, so how could I lose?”

“You couldn’t!” answered Harry, as the two were carried by the wave of Gryffindors for a party in their tower.

Soon, the common room was turned into a dance stage, with Butterbeer smuggled in from Hogsmeade, courtesy of Fred and George.

Soon, the Shades were in a corner of their own, and even Hermione had opted to join in the fun instead of doing homework, though all of them were over a year ahead of their classmates under Harry’s tutelage.

It wasn’t long before the party got louder, with Firewhisky going around amongst the upper years, while Harry and Ginny were dancing merrily on one of the tables, to the claps of most of the first and second years who had congregated around them.

Night-time came along, and the Gryffindors still weren’t tired, even though they had gone outside in the evening for an impromptu Quidditch match. Then, they returned to the dorms for the night,



where they continued their celebration, even though it was, by now, significantly toned down.

Suddenly, the portrait of the Fat Lady swung open and McGonagall entered the room, wearing a stony expression.

The Gryffindors frantically tried to erase any evidence of Firewhisky and other illegal materials, but their head of house paid no heed to them.

“There has been another attack” she said, her voice shaking “Owen Miller from Hufflepuff was found petrified in the fifth floor. Everyone, please remain in your dorms.” And with those words, she left the room, in which a sudden blanket of silence had fallen.

Ginny fell down into the sofa beside Harry, while everyone around them was in a sombre mood.

“Now what?” she asked, looking at him.

Harry gazed into her brown eyes for a moment before glancing around at his friends, who all regarded him with a mixture of anxiety, concern and hope.

“Now.” He said “We prepare for the worst.”

**.-0-.**

It was as if a blanket of dread had fallen over Hogwarts. The attack on Filch’s cat had created whispers and rumours, but it was just a cat, and most people thought of it as a nasty prank. Now however, when one of their fellow classmates was lying petrified in the hospital wing, the atmosphere was one of fear.

Most of the Gryffindors insisted that the Slytherins were behind the attack, and the latter looked cheerful, as the attack seemed to have bolstered their confidence after their defeat.

The number of students that thought Harry was the heir had fallen significantly, though many times he would talk to people only to have them insist on their blood-purity.

Meanwhile, Harry and his friends spent a lot of time talking about what exactly the Monster of Slytherin could be. Then, Neville mentioned hearing odd voices before the first attack.

“Did the voices sound like...hissing?” asked Harry

“Well...I don’t remember all that well, but I suppose that it could be...you think it might be some sort of snake?”

“That would make sense...Slytherin was a parselmouth, his monster is a snake only he can control...” said Ginny.

“But to petrify students? What could do that?” asked Hermione.

“A Basilisk.” answered Harry.

“A what?” came from Ron.

“Basilisks...but there hasn’t been one for over a thousand years...and they kill with their sight, not petrify...” said Hermione.

“Yes, but if their sight was reflected of something...like the water on the second floor corridor or that suit or armour near the place where that Hufflepuff was...” said Harry.

“It might be...but if it really is a Basilisk we’re...”

“Toast.” said Neville, finishing Hermione’s sentence.

“How would we defeat one?” asked Ron.

“Well...a rooster’s call is known to kill them...” started Hermione.

“And Hagrid said that someone has been killing his roosters!” said Ginny.

“More evidence to support my conclusion then...it’s a good thing we are in the seventh floor...the Monster probably lives in the dungeons...so we’re probably safer up there...” said Harry.

“But what are we going to do?” asked Ron.

“Well...we should carry mirrors to make sure we can see in corners without dying...and I’ve brewed some basilisk anti-venom...”

“What? That is impossible! The recipe has been lost!” said Hermione.

“Well, you should know by now that impossible does not apply to Harry” said Ginny.

Harry handed his four companions small bottles of a pitch-black substance, attached to chains. “Wear these at all times” he said “If you’re bitten, apply some of it over the wound...and get to the Hospital wing as soon as possible, for it uses your magic to counter the venom, and you’ll get tired very fast.”

It was several weeks after the Quidditch match when a large brown owl came to Harry’s table while he was having breakfast, dropping an envelope with the seal of the Ministry of Magic in front of him.

Harry, still munching on a treacle tart, picked it up and read it.

Dear Mr Potter.

The Ministry of Magic would like to inform you that it is reconsidering the incarceration of Mr Sirius Orion Black, your legal godfather. Under the emergency measures undertaken by the Head of the Department of Law Enforcement, **Bartemius** Crouch, during the war against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, your Godfather was imprisoned without a trial, on what an official committee appointed by the Minister of Magic has labelled as “circumstantial and insufficient evidence”. Based on the findings of the committee, the Minister has ordered that Mr Black be removed from Azkaban and be placed in a temporary Ministry holding cell, pending an official trial to be held on March 17th. As Mr Black’s godson and heir, you have the right to schedule a meeting with him through the Ministry.

The Ministry of Magic wishes you a pleasant day,

Silvia Flatwood, Committee of Wizarding Justice.

“What is it mate?” asked Ron beside him.

"It's from the Ministry, about my Godfather."

"Godfather?" asked Ginny.

Harry launched into a brief explanation of how his parents were betrayed, how Sirius was blamed, his own suspicions and how he was trying to get him out with the help of the Goblin in charge of the Black Estate.

"Well...I guess I am going to visit him...I'll have to arrange with Dumbledore about it."

"No chance we can come?" asked Neville.

"No...I think only relatives can...sorry Nev." said Harry.

"McGonagall is going around collecting names for people staying over Christmas...who's going to?" asked Hermione, changing the subject.

"Well...It depends on you guys...because I'm definitely not going back to the Dursleys...so I might go over to the Burrow with you Ginny...if you and Ron are going home..."

"No such luck mate...we're staying...plus, I want to get to the bottom of all this chamber stuff." said Ron.

"I'm staying too." added Neville. "Gran said something about seeing my great-uncle."

"Well, if everyone else is staying, then I guess I'll put my name on the list too...though Mum wouldn't be too happy about it." said Hermione.

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Harry eventually managed to gain a permission to leave school grounds to visit Sirius. So, on the morning of the 13th of December, the raven hared boy visited the Ministry once more.

After having his wand checked at the entrance, he proceeded via the lifts to the 2nd level. He went across the main Hall and into the Auror

Headquarters. He glanced into the cubicles where wizards could be seen moving around, some frantic, others calmly sipping some tea.

Finally, he came to a door which said "Committee of Wizarding Justice." He entered it and came into a lobby where a secretary was sitting behind a mahogany desk. She was a grey-haired old lady, with a kind face.

"May I help you?" she asked.

"Yes. I'd like to meet with my Godfather, Sirius Black if it is possible."

"Ah. You would be Mr Potter then?"

"Alright then. Please wait here for a moment." She said, getting up and walking into a side room. Ten minutes later, she returned and handed him a strange looking stone with runes on it.

"Take this stone to the holding cells in Level One. Give it to the Warden to see the prisoner. You will be required to undergo an Identity and Weapons check, as well as leaving all personal effects with the Warden."

"Thank You." Said Harry.

After the warden, a greying old man whose character reminded Harry of Mad-Eye Moody, finished scanning Harry with a number of strange devices, he passed in front of a series of cell doors and down several flights of stairs before arriving at one labelled: 'High Security Hearing Room No 5.'

"You have 30 minutes." Said one of the Guards that came with him.

Harry entered the room, the cell door closing heavily behind him. Sitting in a table in front of him was a man with a mass of filthy, matted hair that hung to his elbows. He had waxy skin, stretched tightly over the bones of his face. His yellow teeth were bared in an almost feral grin. His eyes were shining, and they were fixed on Harry.

"Hello Sirius." Whispered Harry, his heart filling with emotion.

“Harry.” Came out the man’s hoarse voice.

“How are you?”

“I have seen better days.” He said, attempting a laugh which turned into a cough.

“I know that you are innocent Padfoot.” said Harry.

“You do?” answered the marauder, looking at Harry with hope in his eyes.

“Peter was the secret-keeper...and he killed the muggles didn’t he?”

“Little Peter...managed to pull one over us all...I’d kill the traitorous rat if I got my hands on him...I’m sorry Harry.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry about Sirius.”

“No...I...It was my idea to make Peter the secret keeper...I thought it was the perfect plan...Voldemort would go after me, James and Lily would be safe...turns out this plan handed them straight into the Death Eater’s clutches...it’s as if I killed them.” Said Sirius, his head sagging.

“It isn’t your fault...no-one knew this could possibly happen...”

“I’ve made so many mistakes...I could have saved your parents...and I could have saved you from the Dursleys...Dumbledore told me what they have done...I should have been there...”

“You have spoken to Dumbledore?” asked Harry, visibly surprised.

“Yes. He came by a few days ago...but he didn’t tell me too much about you...speak to me about your life Harry. You’re a Gryffindor right?”

“Yes...and a seeker in the team too...the youngest in a century.”

“Taking after James eh? How did you get in? First-years don’t go to tryouts.”

The next half hour passed with Harry detailing his getting on the team, his matches until now, how he fought Voldemort/Quirrel and the Lestranges, even some of the pranks he played, and the match of Slytherin vs Gryffindor that ended up with Malfoy in the Hospital wing. He refrained from mentioning the Chamber of Secrets opening, not wanting to make his godfather worry any more than he already was, for the man had already expressed his fear and pride for him.

"You certainly lead an interesting life Harry...reminds me of the marauders..." said Sirius, whose face had now lifted, the lines in it disappearing, making him look much younger.

"Your time is up." Sounded a metallic voice in the room.

"Goodbye Harry. Thank you for visiting me."

"Don't worry Sirius...we'll get you out of here, even if it means I have to break you out. Be safe." Said Harry, exiting the room and heading back towards the exit.

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In the next few days, a blizzard begun, soon covering the entire school in snow. Herbology classes were cancelled, and Christmas decorations started being placed around the school. On the morning of the 17th, a notice was posted in the great hall, detailing a duelling club to be held at 8 a.m in the Great Hall. Harry could hear many excited whispers saying that they would be there.

The classes of the day passed by fairly quickly, and as 8 a.m came by, the Great Hall was filled to the brim with students of all ages.

"Who do you think will be teaching us." asked Neville.

"With our luck, I'd say it's Lockhart, the most incompetent teacher in Hogwarts, and Snape, the one that hates us most." answered Harry.

True to his words, it was not long before those two came out into the hall. After Lockhart made a mockery of himself, everyone divided up in pairs and duelled.

Apart from the Shades, everyone performed abysmally. Then Harry spoke up

“How about a practice duel? Me against Professor Snape?” he said with an innocent voice.

Lockhart was about to express his disagreement, when Snape moved in.

“Certainly...the class should see what happens to those whose head gets too big for their shoulders.”

Harry and Snape moved to opposite ends of the Duelling corridor, Lockhart started counting.

“3...2”

“Your father could never take me on unless he had five people with him Potter...he was a coward, just like you...he deserved his end..”

Something in Harry snapped, and a beast rose in him

“1!”

Harry, without quite comprehending his own actions, pointed his wand at Snape and shouted.

“AVAD...” He stopped mid-spell, a rational voice coming to the surface, stopping him from casting the killing curse. As he struggled to regain control, he felt a disarming spell knock him back and his wand travelled to Snape.

“As I said Potter...you are worthless.” Snape was cut in the middle as Harry waved his hand, and a tremendous wave of energy hit the man, knocking him back until he hit the wall and slumped to the floor. Harry’s wand then flew back to his hand.

Snape stood up, glaring at Harry, who smiled in return. “I don’t think so Snape.”



“Stupefy!” shouted the Potions master, but Harry just waved his wand and the spell dissipated.

“Incarcerous! Stupefy!” continued the Slytherin head of House, but Harry just reflected them back to him. Then, he concentrated and became invisible.

Snape looked around him, a murderous expression on his face. Suddenly, his clothes turned red, he sprouted a long beard worthy of Dumbledore and was hoisted up in the air by a Levicorpus spell.

Harry reappeared beside him as the man struggled and shouted, the spectators hearing nothing due to a well-placed silencing charm by Harry.

Finally, Snape fell to the ground, unconscious.

“I believe I win.” Said Harry, before descending back into the crowd to his friends, who were laughing furiously.

Snape was revived, and returned to his original condition, but he stalked off angrily to his dungeons, and a lost professor Lockhart dismissed the club. Harry sent his friends to the Gryffindor dormitories while he visited the kitchens for a late night snack. After eating, he left, going up to the stairs, thinking about the club.

He had almost killed Snape. Granted, it would not have been a loss, but to do it in front of all those witnesses...it just wasn't him. It was almost as if he had lost control, and someone else was acting at the time.

Harry moved furiously through the hallways in the empty castle, still deep in thought. Suddenly, he turned down a hallway, only to come face to face with two large yellow eyes on top of a large serpentine head. Instinctively, he drew his magic around him, trying to counter the foreign magic that sought to end his life.

He had little success in holding it back, so he drew out his entire adult magical core to counteract the lethal basilisk magic. A bright yellow sphere clashed with his own, pulsing metallic grey core. Still, he felt his magic losing, retreating slowly. He then tried to draw out his

second core, the one that came from the new world he was in, but found it oddly unresponsive.

Finally, with great difficulty, he drew it out, placing it by his original core. It was pitch black and wild. He tried controlling it to stop the Basilisk, but the magic seemingly had a will of its own, lashing out aggressively towards the source of the attack. As his magic attacked the Basilisk, Harry felt his consciousness disappearing.

The last thing Harry Potter noticed before falling into silent darkness was the light reflected off the Christmas decorations as his magic turned the Hallway into a blazing inferno.

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Hehehe...next chapter, Harry's funeral!...just kidding.

Reviews are most welcome...as always...but if you must say how bad I am, please offer suggestions on how I can improve.

## Chapter 12 – The Snake's Lair

Darkness....

Blissful, Eternal Darkness...

It was a strange feeling....he could feel magic humming in his ears, he could feel lights of all colours swirling surround him...

*'Is this death?'*

He opened his eyes and looked around him....he was at some abandoned beach. Pine trees lined coast, a blinding sun stood in the horizon and the sea was washing against the sand... a blood-red sea.

*'Am I dreaming?'*

He tried speaking, but found himself unable to...the entire scene felt lifeless...almost dead.

He looked down at his body, and was surprised to find none there. He looked around once more, and tried using his magic, only to find that his magic was not part of him, but was surrounding him, in every speck of dust, in every drop of water, in every part of the pitch-black sun that stood opposite its burning white twin in the sky.

Harry took in the unreality of the scene around him, scoffing at the idea of a black sun.

*'I must be in my mind...looks like I sunk into my magic after that basilisk...interesting place my subconscious has made...'* he thought.

He walked, or rather *glided* up to the water, and moved so as to touch the water, if he had a hand...still; he felt the red liquid, positively vibrating with energy. He willed part of it to rise, and it did, collecting in a ball, floating in front of him. He let it drop.

He moved over to the palm tree forest, entering it. The scenery shifted by magic, and he found himself in the middle of a dense jungle.

*‘Well...seems I won’t be waking up anytime soon...better explore a bit around here.’*

He walked in the jungle until he lost track of time...hours could have passed, or it could have been days, or even months.

Still, he felt a dark shadow lurking between the trees. He could see it, with the corner of his eye, moving like a predator, watching him, stalking him.

He finally came to a clearing, in which he found a strange altar. He passed the monoliths that stood around it, carved with incomprehensible runic patterns, and moved into the centre of the strange shape on the floor.

His world exploded with light, and he felt as if he was floating, floating in space, floating in time. Images of lives, of Servants, Kings and Warriors, of bloodshed and love, passed through his eyes with blinding speed. Then, everything went still, and he heard voices speak in his ear.

“Hail Harry Potter, Boy-Who-Lived, Slayer of the Serpent, Champion, Chosen One”

“Hail Harry Potter, Lord of Potter, Lord of Black, Traveller of Worlds, Commander, Adversary.”

“Hail Harry Potter, Defeater of the Dark Lord, Master of Shadows, Outlaw, Hunter, Paladin.”

And then, a darker voice, almost in a whisper:

“Hail Harry Potter, Legion Master, General, King, Emperor Eternal.”

The scene around him changed, the forest changing into a cave so vast, its edges could not be seen. Fiery chasms and lava pits were strewn across it, and Harry could see souls being tortured by what looked like Demons.

He felt sick as he heard the screams emanating from around him. He felt a presence around him, and turned around, only to be faced with a source of blinding light.

“Your sons shall be kings Harry Potter...but you must be wary of the other, for he can be your downfall...and the downfall of everything you ever fought for.” Said a voice from the light and everything around him turned into a dark pit of nothingness.

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Harry woke up panting, before recognizing the Hogwarts infirmary. He saw a figure leaning over him, and reached for his glasses. He put them on his face, and the face of Madam Pomfrey appeared over him.

“Mr Potter, how do you feel?” she asked.

“Fine.” lied Harry, his voice coming out raspy from disuse. In truth, he felt as though he had gone through an exhausting ritual, and his muscles were aching. But he still felt good enough to get out of the infirmary.

“May I speak to him now Poppy?” came a voice behind the matron.

“Yes Albus, but you had better not disturb him, or any of my patients.” Said the woman, before moving away swiftly.

Dumbledore came near Harry, and sat down in a chair next to him, an unreadable expression on his face. He seemed reluctant to start conversation, so Harry spoke first.

“How long was I out headmaster?”

“You have been petrified for about 5 months Harry. It is the night of May 29th.”

“Petrified?”

“Yes...you were one of many attacks, though you were the last to be petrified...all other victims of Slytherin’s Monster were found dead, horribly mangled and with basilisk venom in their blood.”

“Dead?”

“Mr Huts from Hufflepuff, Miss Jones and Mr Baker from Ravenclaw. This morning, tow girls, Miss Miles from Ravenclaw and Miss Hadi from Gryffindor went missing, a message claiming that they would be held in the Chamber was left behind.”

*‘Seems that the Basilisk didn’t take a vacation while I was out...though it looks like its eyes are gone...I wonder why Dumbledore still has the job?’* He thought. Then, he realised the implications what the headmaster had just mentioned.

“Did you say that two girls were taken, today?”

“Yes Mr Potter. The message left said that their bones would forever remain in the Chamber.”

“Where are my friends?”

“All students have been ordered to the dormitories...though I have not seen your friends since the morning feast.”

“Thank you Headmaster, but I am afraid I will have to go now. I have some urgent business to attend to.” said Harry, sweeping off the bed.

“Please return to your bed Mr Potter.” said Dumbledore, rising to block Harry. “The Hallways are forbidden for students in light of the attack.”

“Please stand aside Headmaster.” said Harry evenly.

“I’m afraid I can’t do that Mr Potter.”

“There are lives at stake; stand aside.”

“Return to your bed Mr Potter, you are weak, and in no condition to be running around with a basilisk on the prowl.”

“I’m sorry Albus, but there is no other way.” said Harry, before launching an orb of silver fire at the old man.

Dumbledore immediately conjured a shield, easily blocking the projectile, but the interaction bought Harry enough time to slip by and leave the infirmary, its doors banging loudly behind him.

Harry flew down the stairs, moving with great speed through deserted hallways. Finally, he came to a halt outside the abandoned bathroom on the second floor. He opened the door carefully, and looked around in the bathroom, still dressed in the infirmary's robes.

"Myrtle?" he called.

There was no response for a short time, but soon a ghost came through one of the stands.

"You are a *boy*. What are you doing in a *girl's* bathroom?" she asked. "Even if it seems to have turned into a highway recently." she added, as if speaking to herself.

"Has anyone passed by recently?"

"Oh yes...first there was that girl, who carried another girl, unconscious behind her. Then there was that group of loud Gryffindors that have been around here so often lately...none of them ever stop to say hello...nobody cares about Myrtle..." said the ghost of the girl, starting to sob again.

Harry ignored her remarks about how cruel everyone was to her, and approached one of the sinks nearby.

*Open* he hissed in parseltongue. The sink moved aside, revealing an opening to a tube that disappeared deep into the bowels of the school.

Harry cast a few spells on himself to transfigure his infirmary clothes into something more...appropriate and to make them impervious to all the grime lining the walls of the tube. Then, he jumped into it, sliding deep under the ground.

The ride was not very long, and Harry finally landed on the ground, rat bones crunching under his feet.

“Inlumino” he muttered, and a white orb appeared over his head, casting its soft light along the cavern walls.

He walked at a brisk pace along the corridor, angrily batting away the spider-webs that were in his way. He finally came to a large door, decorated with twin serpents.

Harry spoke *Open* to the door, and with a grinding sound, it moved, revealing Salazar Slytherin’s chamber of Secrets.

He moved in, and his attention was immediately captured by a high pitched scream. He turned towards it, and his heart clenched painfully.

The Basilisk stood there, in all its glory, its eyes burned out, poised to strike at the small frame of the redheaded girl that was sending dozens of spells its way, only to have them bounce harmlessly off its enchanted skin.

Harry could see Neville lying nearby, his robes torn and blood flowing freely from his numerous wounds. From the corner of his eye, he could see more figures to his right, but had no time to look. The Basilisk had opened its mouth, ready to kill Ginny.

“Contun-funda!” he bellowed, and a large, conjured rock launched itself at the Basilisk, crushing into its head.

Now, the Basilisk was a creature that could withstand most spells, but no living thing on this world could possibly ignore a ton of hard rock impacting it on its head.

It was knocked back, hitting the wall with a loud bang, and started writhing on the floor, hissing obscenities. Harry moved towards Ginny, kneeling over the girl.

“Are you alright?”

“Harry? I’m okay...what are you...” but she was interrupted by a voice behind her.

“Well, if it isn’t the ringleader...Harry Potter.”



Harry turned around, only to come face to face with Tom Marvolo Riddle.

"How nice of you to join our little party. It seems your friends have been having a lot of fun already."

"Voldemort." said Harry coldly.

"Ah so you know? I would have expected you to Harry Potter. A most fascinating person you are...such power and knowledge...there are many similarities amongst us you know Potter...we are both Orphans...both raised by Muggles, both parselmouths, both dark wizards, both of us have formed our own little groups..."

"What a pity that this world only has enough space for one of us then." Sneered Harry.

"As you wish Potter. Your friends could not stop my resurrection...now, it is time for all of you to die." *Kill Him!*

The basilisk rose behind Harry, and moved swiftly towards him. It launched it's jaws at him, but Harry had already moved out of the way.

"Ginny, go help the others...get them out of here if you can, I'll take care of this."

"But..."

"DO IT Ginny!" said Harry in a voice that brooked no disagreement.

The girl nodded, and moved quickly to check on the other Shade members. Harry turned towards the basilisk.

"Fulmen!" he cried, and a large lighting bolt hit the Basilisk, making it seethe. Still, the spell, while hurting it, did not appear to be enough to stop it.

"Sectumsebra! Condolescus! Deflagro! Caedro! Concetius!" screamed Harry in quick succession, letting the beast within him attack the snake with all its might, but all the cutting and burning

curses in the world wouldn't be enough to destroy the Basilisk's enchanted skin.

*'It's not supposed to be this strong...even it was hatched by Salazar Slytherin...I'd bet both he and Tom have enhanced it somehow ...a phoenix would be real useful right now.'*

Harry jumped once more, barely dodging another strike from the now livid snake, while Riddle was just laughing in the background.

*'I killed it last time...maybe...'* "Calo Foramen Sorting Hat!" he shouted. A black circle appeared next to him, and the Sorting Hat came through, following the call of Harry's modified summoning charm.

"A hat?" asked Riddle in a mocking tone. "How will that help you?"

Harry just ignored him, and put the hat on his head.

*'I need the sword of Godric Gryffindor...please...'*

*'I am not sure if I should give it to you Mr Potter...it is not meant to be wielded by the impure...'*

*'I have wielded it before! And it was created to destroy Slytherin's Basilisk!'*

The hat gave no response. Instead, something heavy hit Harry's head. Grinning, he picked up Godric's sword.

"Oh Basilisk..." he called mockingly, while at the same time concentrating as much of his magic as he could into his arms, strengthening his muscles until he had inhuman strength.

He launched the sword across the room, the torch-light reflecting off the swirling blade, and it impaled itself into the Serpent's skull, the enchanted sword easily ripping through all the protections that lay on the flesh of Slytherin's Pet.

"Looks like your little snake is dead." said Harry to Riddle.

“Not a problem...Avada Kedavra!” cried the teen, green light emanating from the wand he held. Harry jumped aside easily.

“I don’t think so... extermino!” cried Harry, pointing at the diary that was nearby. It glowed white for a second, and then exploded into a burst of flame and ash.

To his surprise however, Riddle just stood there, unaffected, a maniac gleam on his eyes.

“I’m afraid you are too late...you see, Miss Miles and Miss Hadi have already given their lives to return me to power...and *you* Harry Potter, have the honour of becoming my first victim.”

Harry immediately felt weary. This was not going to be easy...Quirrell last year, while augmented in terms of power by Voldemort’s spirit, was just another dark wizard...now, he would have to fight Lord Voldemort’s 16 year old self...and Harry was not in the best of condition to be fighting the teenage imprints of dark lords.

Riddle waved his wand, sending seven black arrows towards him, which Harry knew from experience were heavily poisoned. He summoned the corpse of the Basilisk, and the arrows embedded themselves in its skin, the enchantments on it dead along with the snake.

Dodging a fireball aimed for his head, Harry send a long, bony spear towards Riddle, who made it split in two and miss him. In response, Riddle sent a spiked ball towards Harry.

The clash between the two continued for a long time, darkness against darkness, power against power. The two seemed evenly matched, until, finally, a white bolt of pure energy struck Riddle straight in the heart, destroying the soul that once resided in the Hoxcrux.

Harry collapsed on to the floor, wincing as his charred leg made contact with the ground.

“Are you okay Harry?” came a voice behind him. Turning his head, he saw Ron looking at him, his face pale.

“Well enough...how is everyone?”

“Neville’s been bitten by the Basilisk...we gave him some anti-venom...Hermione has broken her leg and arm. The two other girls are dead, me and Ginny are mostly okay.”

“Good...now come on, we need to get them all out of here.”

“Mobilicorpus, Mobilicorpus.” Muttered Ron, raising the two dead bodies in the air, while behind him Ginny did the same to Neville’s unconscious body. Ron moved over, and gave his shoulder to Hermione, helping her walk.

Harry picked up the ruined diary and led the way, limping from his injuries. He glanced sadly at the dead bodies following him.

*‘I go to sleep for a few months and everyone starts to die...’* he thought, before opening the door that led out of the chamber.

They moved back through the corridor until they came to the base of the tube. Ron looked at it quizzically.

“How do we get up?” he asked.

*Up? Rise? Stairs? Lift?* tried Harry, but to no avail. Finally, he pointed his wand up the hole and shouted: “Expello Linum!”. A thick rope appeared from his wand, falling to the ground. “Wingardium Leviosa!” the rope rose into the air, until it disappeared.

“A levitation charm? Do you think that it will hold?” asked Hermione, doubtful.

“My levitation charm would hold under anything Hermione. Though we will have to tie you to the end of the rope, as you can’t climb with your injuries.”

Hermione muttered something about not liking being towed up that grimy thing, but said that she would bear it.

They went up the rope, Ginny tying the end onto Hermione before she left. The floating bodies trailed up the pipe behind them.

They finally reached the top, and Harry took the edge of the rope, until then suspended in mid-air by magic, and pulled it up, his magic helping him drag Hermione on the top.

“Let’s go to the hospital wing.” Muttered Harry, now feeling very tired and wary of the questions that he knew would soon bombard them.

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It was not a cheerful group that burst into the Hogwarts infirmary. Having two corpses trailing behind you was not the best way to announce your arrival.

Madam Pomfrey went white when she saw them.

“Are they...?” she began, afraid of the answer

“Dead. Yes, but Neville’s still alive...he’ll need care though. He’s been bitten, though we’ve given him anti-venom.” answered Harry swiftly.

The matron had by now paled so much that it was hard to tell where her skin ended and the hospital gown began.

“Put him on a bed. Now!” she called, before leaving to get some potions.

Ginny lowered Neville’s body on one of the beds, while Harry and Ron helped Hermione into one of the others.

When she returned, she went over Neville and started pouring things down his throat. Once she was satisfied with her progress, she turned towards the others.

“You get on a bed now. Especially you Mr Potter. Leaving the infirmary without permission...now look what you’ve done to your leg!”

*‘Good thing Dumbledore isn’t here...I’ll get some sleep before I have to answer his questions.’*

Madam Pomfrey took extra time fussing over each of them and repairing Hermione's broken limbs, almost as if she wanted to prolong having to look at the dead girls as long as possible.

Harry would have liked to see how the Matron would deal with the situation, but the last thing he could remember before everything went blank was Madam Pomfrey giving him a batch of dreamless sleep potion.

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For the past few months, not that Harry knew of it, the atmosphere in Hogwarts was one of fear. With all the people dead, many students had left the school, and for those that remained, every new death struck closer to their hearts.

The news of the double deaths initially caused even greater panic, but as soon as Ginny and Ron woke, they made sure to pass on the message: The monster of Slytherin was dead, and the heir was defeated.

And they owed it all to Harry Potter.

When the boy woke up, the blinding spring sun was shining from the windows. He groaned as he tried to cover his eyes.

"Harry!" came a voice from beside him, and he was soon engulfed in a sea of red hair.

"Mphh...Ginny." mumbled Harry, happily hugging the girl.

She looked up into his eyes, and Harry could see the concern etched on her face.

"You never really get a break do you?"

"Mmmm...you were the ones that went down there in the first place."

"We weren't stuck in a hospital wing for five months!" she exclaimed.

"And I still had to save you all." said Harry.

“And you don’t know how grateful I am for that...for you being okay...for all of this being over.” she said, sinking her head into his chest again.

“It isn’t over Ginny.” said Harry, staring of solemnly into space. “In fact, it has barely begun.”

“It’s V..Voldemort isn’t it?” she asked, “He was behind this...and the stone last year...” she trailed off.

“And he is still out there...not quite alive, but too tainted by dark magic to be dead.”

“And he’ll be back.” Said the Girl, fear and courage mixed in her voice.

“Yes we will...we can delay it, but he will be back eventually.”

“But you’ll be there to stop him...and we’ll be with you.” she said, stubbornly.

Harry turned his gaze back on her, and suddenly realised the magnitude of what he was dragging her into. “Ginny...you don’t have to fight this war you know...”

“If you fight, I fight.” she cut in. “I am your friend, and I am a shade. I chose to fight Harry...and I chose to fight for you, no matter who your enemy is.”

Harry tightened his hold on the girl, until a voice came from the side:

“Harry, I think you should let go of my sister now, before I reach the limits of what I can take as a brother.”

The two broke apart, with a slight blush in their cheeks, and turned around to see Ron and Hermione grinning behind them.

“Nice to see you awake mate.”

“Hey Ron.” said Harry. “I think I’ve had more than my share of sleep. How’s your arm and leg Hermione?”

“Pomfrey fixed it easily.” said the girl “It was mainly the blood-loss and exhaustion that I had to recover from.”

“How’s Neville?”

“Still Asleep I’m afraid.” said Ginny. “The potion you made saved his life, but it used up all his magic in the process...he is suffering from magical exhaustion, I asked Madam Pomfrey, she said it will take at least a week before he wakes up.”

“Better than dead though.” added Ron.

“So...what has been going on while I was off dreaming?” asked Harry.

Hermione looked at Ron worriedly, but he did not seem inclined to speak. Ginny however did not hesitate to answer Harry’s question.

“It was bad Harry...it was bad...it was almost like being at war in a way...muggleborns being attacked left and right, not knowing who the next one might be...some people thought you were the heir, but then you were attacked...” at this point Ginny broke away.

“We found you Harry...lying there, everything burnt to ashes, it was almost like walking into a bomb site.” said Hermione.

“When you were attacked” continued Ginny “everything fell apart. You were sort of a constant...but when people saw how much of a fight you put up, and you were *still* petrified...I think that is when the real fear begun.”

“And then came the deaths...” said Ron. “The board of Governors forced Dumbledore to leave his post at one point. But doing so only resulted in greater chaos.... “

“The students had become almost uncontrollable, the muggleborns not daring to leave their dorms. Eventually, as the situation looked bleak, the board begged Dumbledore to return.” came from Ginny.

“We researched the legend, until we finally found that Moaning Myrtle was the last victim, and we found that the entrance to the chamber



was in that bathroom.” said Ron. “Neville wanted to go in at that point, but we convinced him that it was not a good idea.”

“But when the two girls were taken, we had to intervene...we were sure they would be used for some dark ritual.” said Ginny.

“They were...that diary thing was a Horcrux.”

“And it killed the girls...to resurrect You-Know-Who?” asked Ron, with a shudder.

“Yes...we stopped it this time, but there will be more attempts.”

The group fell oddly silent after this ominous prediction.

“Well, at least there are good news” said Ginny after a while, changing the subject. “Your Godfather is free.”

Harry’s head snapped up so fast he could have sworn he heard a crack.

“What?”

“The ministry held the trial, while you were out, on March 17th. He was declared innocent due to insufficient evidence...especially since Dumbledore withdrew his statements that condemned him as the secret keeper last time.” continued Ginny.

“Finally they’ve done something right...you certainly seem to have been keeping an eye on things.”

“I try Harry, I try. I knew you would want to know all about it anyway.” she smiled at him.

“Lockhart’s gone too.” said Ron, looking happy. “Fled the school after the second death.”

Hermione frowned. “Ron, I’m sure he had important things to...”

“Hermione, the only thing Lockhart is talented in is Memory Charms. He has stolen these stories from other people, trust me on this, I know.”

"But..." said the bushy haired girl.

Ginny cut in at that point.

"Harry knows what he is talking about Hermione!" she snapped angrily

"For Merlin's sake Hermione, don't believe everything that he has said...look at what he has done! Nothing! He couldn't even handle some pixies!" said Harry.

Any further disagreements from the girl where stopped at that point, for Madam Pomfrey, having noticed the noise level, came over to her most common patient.

"So you're awake Mr Potter. Good." She waved a wand over him, muttering some incantations. "Well, everything seems to be in order. You may leave whenever you wish, but I do not want to see you in here again for a long, long time, understood?" she said, fixing a glare upon him. "The way you are going, I think I should make a permanent bed for you."

She turned to leave, but, remembering something at the last moment, she talked again: "The Headmaster told me to let you know that he wishes to see you Mr Potter. I will inform him to come over here." And with those words, she left.

"Don't worry Harry." said Ginny, seeing his face. "You may have broken over a dozen rules, including attacking the Headmaster, but you saved everyone! He's already given you 200 points and a special services award; I don't think he is going to punish you after that."

"200 points...we're probably doing well in the house-cup then...wait, what about Quidditch?" asked Harry.

"Well, Wood couldn't find a seeker, so we lost a game, but it doesn't matter, because the cup was cancelled due to the attacks." said Hermione. "You should have seen his face though, it was as if the world had ended."

"Hermione, no Quidditch IS as close to the world ending as you can get!" exclaimed Ron.

The two started going into a friendly argument about the value of Quidditch, and Harry found himself oddly relaxed by it, for he knew that this was a part of normal life, the calm after the storm.

Or before it. For he knew that he had a long way to go before it was over.

Ginny, following his trail of thoughts, squeezed his hand encouragingly, and Harry smiled at her.

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"Mr Potter." came the Headmaster's voice, later that evening.

Harry turned around, facing the old wizard. "I'm sorry for my conduct sir...but at that moment..."

"You were worried for your friends. It is understandable. I have no hard feelings Mr Potter, though I would trust that such an event is not repeated." Said the headmaster, fixing Harry with a stare.

"Certainly Headmaster. I was not in the best emotional state at the moment."

"Do tell me, how did you manage to remain alive, despite the lethal power of the basilisk's stare?"

"Well...I thought that it might be a basilisk after the students, based on the effects, so when I heard a voice hissing about killing people, I conjured a mirror and set the place on fire, thinking that perhaps I could kill it...unfortunately, it didn't work."

"There was no mirror when we found you..."

"Maybe it melted...or the conjuration just wore off, I did do it rather Hastily after all."

The Headmaster seemed to accept this explanation, for he asked no further questions.

“Well Mr Potter. I would like to thank you on behalf of the school for what you have done. Gryffindor has received 200 points for your bravery, and a further 200 for the bravery of your friends. You have also received a special services award for the school.”

“Sir...in the Chamber, I put on the hat, and it...”

“You pulled out the sword of Godric Gryffindor for the Sorting Hat. Your friends have already told me about it...and Fawkes has done me the favour of retrieving it and the Sorting Hat from the chamber.”

“Do you know how I managed to do that sir?” asked Harry.

“Only a true Gryffindor could have pulled that sword out of the hat Harry.” Said Dumbledore with pride.

“Sir? Will there be a feast? Because I haven’t really eaten in a long time...”

“Certainly Mr Potter...I shouldn’t be keeping you hungry! In fact, I think that lunch should be served right now. Have a nice day Mr Potter.” said the old man, with a twinkle in his eyes.

As Harry went towards the feast however, he could not shake the impression that something was odd about the way Dumbledore looked at him. It was almost as if the old man knew something and was trying to figure out a complicated puzzle.

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Harry entered the great hall, only to be greeted by a standing ovation from the students, many of whom came directly up to him and apologized for believing that he could be the heir. Even some Slytherins clapped, though Mafloy was looking sulky, and fixing glares at the Shades.

“We went a little overboard on having fun with him in your absence.” Whispered Ginny in Harry’s ear when she followed his gaze to the

blonde Slytherin. "He didn't seem to like the attention that he gets when he is stuck in mid-air wearing underwear with hearts on it."

The feast soon turned into an impromptu celebration; classes had been cancelled for the day anyway. It was the best that the teachers could do to take the minds of the students off the high death toll of the school year.

For Harry, the epitome of the celebration was when the doors of the great hall opened to admit a free Sirius Black. The man looked worn from his long imprisonment, and nervous about approaching Harry, but was soon engulfed in a hug by the boy.

"You were let out!" cried Harry happily.

"Yes...even though Crouch was less than happy about it..." said Sirius

"I know. My friends saved me some Daily Prophets."

News in the wizarding world was divided between the attacks in Hogwarts, over which several scathing commentaries had been written, and the great political battle between Crouch and Fudge. On the one hand, Fudge claimed that Crouch's strategies were flawed, pointing at the case of Sirius Black, and on the other, Crouch claimed that it was needed, pointing out the attacks that were going on in Hogwarts and claiming that Sirius was an isolated incident. Albus Dumbledore, which could have swung the conflict either way, chose to stay out of it.

*'And a good thing to.'* Thought Harry, as he thought over this. *'Let them fight amongst themselves...it will make one person point out the stupid mistakes the other makes, so it will stop some of the incompetence of the ministry.'*

The last days of the term passed in a hurry for the Shades. Neville was let out of the hospital wing, and the group was soon complete once more.

Hagrid, who had been arrested and taken to Azkaban under Crouch's orders, returned to the school, giving Fudge even more ammunition to launch against the Head of Law Enforcement.

Sirius had asked, in a trembling voice, whether Harry would like to stay with him, and after Harry's enthusiastic acceptance, he smiled, something which he had rarely done since Azkaban. He left the school, saying that he had many things to take care of, amongst them papers claiming Harry as his charge, and promising to wait for Harry at King's Cross.

The bodies of the dead girls were quickly taken out of the castle, in an attempt to preserve what was left of the innocence of the students. Most teachers tried to keep up a mask of happiness, but beneath it there was immense sadness, part of which had infected the students.

Now, Harry was arguing with his friends in the common room about the classes that they should take next year.

"I'm telling you mate, Divination is going to be easy, why bother with others that give hard homework? You know everything anyway!"

"Ron!" said Hermione "Harry should take more classes; you never know when he might need the knowledge!"

And it was true. Harry did need the knowledge. As adept as he was in battle magicks and rituals, he only had a rudimentary knowledge of arithmancy and ancient runes.

"What will you be taking Hermione?" asked Neville.

"Well...I don't know really...I mean, I would like to take everything if possible."

"You can't do that! Your brain would explode or something!" exclaimed Ron.

Hermione looked rather affronted by that, but her demeanour showed to Harry she was hiding something. A little legilimency showed him that the girl had talked to McGonagall, and the latter had promised

that she would see what she could do so that Hermione could take more classes. Harry decided to drop the subject for now.

"I don't think that Hermione's brain could ever explode, but I think that I need some sleep." started Ginny yawning. "Goodnight everyone...goodnight Harry." she said, before going up the stairs to the girls dormitories.

"She's right." said Harry "It is getting late anyway, I think I'll sleep too." He got up to go to his bed, and Neville followed him. Behind them, Ron and Hermione had settled into another argument.

"They're almost like an old married couple" said Neville, chuckling as they went up the stairs.

"That they are Neville...that they are." said Harry, opening their dormitory door.

As he settled on his bed, he thought: *'And I wouldn't have it any other way.'*

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Whew...glad that is over...it is very, very late over here...and I just want to sleep.

This probably marks the end of sticking to the basic plot of the books...there will be some similarities...Remus will make an appearance soon....as will Wormtail...and there will be a Triwizard tournament eventually, but it will be very different...

Sou Mynona, the bed that Harry slept in was the one in his first year dorm...the one he last slept in when he was 11 years old. (For he moved to a new dorm in each year) Now that he is 21, 10 years have passed since then.

## Chapter 13 – Lion-heart

Diagon Alley was bustling with traffic on this midsummer's day. The shoppers were mainly adult wizards who, despite the unusually high temperature, would go about their business, many of them shopping for the traditional feasts to celebrate the sun.

Fortescue's Ice Cream parlour was, naturally, full. Sweaty wizards in heavy robes, tired of constantly re-casting cooling charms, would sit in the shade provided by umbrellas and happily devoured chocolate and raspberry ice-cream with chopped nuts. The fact that Fortescue offered a free sundae on the half-hour made his customers in no hurry to leave.

Harry frowned at the wizards around him, who, dressed in long, bulky robes, seemed to have no appropriate summer attire. Naturally, there were some wearing thinner robes, from a silk-like material, but they oddly formed a minority.

He gave up trying to figure them out, and ordered another round of ice-cold pumpkin juice. He eagerly let it slide down his parched throat.

He sat back further on his chair, putting the – now empty – glass of juice aside and opened this morning's prophet. His eye captured the title immediately.

### Ministry feud draws on.

This year's epic feud in the Ministry's hierarchy continues, as the Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge, made several scathing comments earlier today on the policies of Bartemius Crouch, Head of Magical Law Enforcement. In his speech, the Minister called Crouch a "fanatic" and his methods of operation "On the same level with Death Eaters, without any legal considerations." The minister also expressed fears that Mr Crouch was cultivating a wave of paranoia with the goal of becoming minister and turning the British Magical Commonwealth into a police state. In a retaliatory statement,



the Head of Law Enforcement called the Minister's claims "groundless" and claims that the Ministry is suffering from crippling bureaucracy and that Fudge is being driven by death-eater money. This is sparked by new revelations regarding the actions of Mr Crouch during....

Article Continued on pages 2,3 and 7.

Turning the page, he read:

**Bartemius Crouch: Not as noble as he pretends to be.**  
By Reeta Skeeter.

We have all heard of Mr Crouch's "honourable" exploits in the war, which reportedly kept death eaters from taking over the ministry. Yet who is this man? This reporter has taken it upon herself to investigate the Head of Law Enforcement's past, with some shocking revelations.

"I always thought that Crouch was a little overboard." Says Hogwart's classmate Melinda Oppentrist. "He would always suck up to the teachers, until they made him prefect and later, Head-boy. From then on, he made Hogwarts into a hell for the rest of us."

Another Classmate, preferring to remain anonymous, stated: "Once he got into a position of authority, he enforced the rules with an iron fist, not hesitating to take points off for the smallest offence and often reducing some of the youngest students to tears. I have never seen a man as cruel and power-hungry as Crouch, save perhaps He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named"

The daily prophet has also shed light on the mysterious events that resulted in the Death

of Mrs Crouch and Crouch Jr. The revelations were startling: Crouch Jr was a Death Eater.

Yes, that's right, the son of the Head of the Department of Law Enforcement was a Death Eater.

The fact that the son of such a prestigious member of society could be turned at such a young age to the dark side raises questions about the way Mr Crouch served his role as a father. Mr Crouch is very likely to have played a direct role in the death of his Family, which may not have been purely accidental....

Harry stopped reading at this point, and flipped quickly through the pages, his eyes passing over articles entitled: **The Tragedy of Sirius Black, What you didn't know about Crouch's Laws** and another one entitled: **Crouch on the way out?**

Harry put the Newspaper aside carelessly. It didn't really offer him any new information.

The fight between Crouch and Fudge had by now reached epic proportions. Harry preferred it like this, rather than one side dominating the political field. After all, neither of the two politicians was exactly on his side.

Crouch was a fanatical dark-wizard hunter, and wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice common citizens on the altar of what he perceived as "Justice". The ministry would be better poised to face any threats from Lord Voldemort, that much is true, but Crouch was also likely to take measures limiting Harry's power...or even try to arrest him.

Fudge on the other hand presented a different danger. While he was corrupt and driven by "honourable" donations, he would never give up his stranglehold on power. The situation with Crouch was likely to make him even more paranoid than usual. The man had already started a press information war – a bad move, for now Crouch would unleash all the little secrets he knew about Fudge's regime. The

minister was likely to issue himself emergency powers to get rid of Crouch, but the latter was too firmly entrenched in the ministry to do so.

The end result would be that either one of them would remain as a puppet minister, or that both would fall and the people would turn to Dumbledore for help.

*‘As much as I may have my disagreements with the headmaster, he is more trustworthy and competent than these two politicians...he fights for our side, as opposed to only serving his interests.’*

He got up and, after paying and eagerly thanking Mr Fortescue, he left the shade of the parlour for the busy alley.

He moved swiftly through the active crowds and passed the shining white of Gringotts as well as Olivander’s, when he turned into a side alley.

The buildings here were noticeably different. Higher, newer, made from red-brick, they did not look like the more traditional ones in Diagon Alley...nor were they obviously magical. Or at least it wasn’t obvious if you ignored the children riding toy brooms or playing with gobstones that spat in their face.

This was the residential heart of Magical London. Ministry Employees who wanted to be close to their work, Shop-workers and owners and Hogwarts graduates who needed a cheap place to live could all be found here.

Harry moved towards one of the larger buildings. He entered the shadow of the lobby and, after identifying himself to the security guard, went up the stairs to the top floor, where the penthouse that Sirius had bought was.

Life with his godfather was fairly good. The man had suffered in Azkaban and, even though Sirius tried to hide it, Harry could see it in his eyes. Sirius looked after Harry with fervour, as the boy seemed to be the only thing he had left to keep him together, and he felt guilt for the death of the Potters. When Sirius had tried to apologise for this, Harry would have none of it.

Today, Remus had come over, and Harry had decided to take a walk, knowing that the two men needed to have a long discussion to get over what had happened in all these years.

As he walked in, he could hear voices from the living room.

“Well, remember that time James accidentally set Lily’s head on fire?”

“She wouldn’t talk to him for almost a month! And the slap he got when he dared comment that it went nicely with her hair.”

“Ouch...I can still remember that....sounded in the entire great hall.”

“Poor Prongs had a red handprint on his cheek for over a week! Snivellus was very glad to comment on it.”

“I still can’t believe he became a teacher...”

“Harry said he is as much of a git as ever....and he is biased towards Slytherin.”

“I’d imagine so....oh, hello Harry.” Said Remus, as Harry walked into the room.

“Talking about Snape? You’d think that there are much more pleasant things to discuss. Like lunch for example.” said Harry.

Sirius quickly adopted a guilty look, while Remus’s eyes danced with amusement. “Let me guess.” he said “Sirius was supposed to cook wasn’t he?”

“He was” answered Harry, with a mock frown “But since his cooking is not exactly...well, not at all edible, I think it may be a good thing he forgot.”

“Hey!” exclaimed Sirius “I am just a little rusty! A little practice and I’ll be at my top form!”

“Which is? Face it Sirius, you and James would always make a hames of the meals....much to Lily’s dismay.” came from Remus

“Well. You certainly neglected mentioning that. Looks like I’ll have to cook...again.” Sighed Harry, going to the kitchen

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Night fell heavy over London, most of which now slept with all windows open to combat the heat. Even if that meant that over half of them would wake up with numerous mosquito bites.

In the darkest shadows of Diagon alley, a figure moved through the littered and abandoned roads. Curiously, the same person could be seen sleeping in Sirius’s apartment, but upon detailed observation, it would be revealed that the latter was an illusion. In front of him, a large white marble building was visible against the clear sky. The reason for his visit, delivered by owl that morning, was now a pile of ash in Sirius’s fireplace.

He entered the bank which was empty and dark, with the exception of a few lone tellers with torches over them. He proceeded to the back of the bank, absently waving at the guard who examined him with interest as he let him to the back offices.

Soon, he reached Brandok’s office. He knocked on the door, which opened promptly.

“Ah! Mr Potter! How pleasant to see you again!” exclaimed the Goblin, shaking Harry’s hand. “Tea?” he offered, and Harry graciously accepted, sitting down.

“The pleasure is mine Brandok. I trust that gold flows in your coffers as always?” He said, while the goblin returned to its desk.

“Naturaly. Our partnership has been very advantageous for the Goblins...and for me personally. The Ministry had been pressing us to allow them access to the Black inheritance...”

“And the Ministry interfering in Goblin affairs is unacceptable. They hold enough influence over Gringotts already.”

He could swear he saw the goblin grin a tiny bit, even though Brandok’s face remained as unemotional as always.

“Indeed. That is one of the reasons why doing business with you is so profitable for us...thanks to you, we have managed to ground the ministry in internal factionalism, which we are able to direct to a certain extent.” Here, Brandok stood up from behind his desk and walked to the back wall of the room, which featured a large golden disk encrusted with diamonds.

“ Fighting each other means that they cannot...attempt to challenge our economic power. Now, we hold a certain extent of power over them. Normally, I wouldn’t disclose this to a human but...this victory, however small, has excited the people.” Here, he turned back to Harry. “ There are calls within the command for greater action against the ministry.”

“Rebellion?” asked Harry, his eyes widening slightly.

“Yes...but we do not want another bloodbath that in the end will mean nothing for us. This time, it has to be different. And that the reason why I was ordered to call you here today.”

“Ordered?”

The Goblin really did grin this time. “It is time Mr Potter, for you to meet some important figures in the goblin community.” Brandok turned towards the wall and muttered some words in an ancient tongue Harry couldn’t identify.

With a rumble, the golden disk retreated, revealing an entrance to a high-ceilinged corridor with magical torches illuminating it with green fire.

“Follow me please Mr Potter.” came from Brandok, before he led the way across the marble floor, his steps echoing strangely.

Harry followed him, eyeing the golden torch holders and the extravagant ceiling decorations depicting goblin wars and heroes. Finally, after walking for what seemed like a long time, they came to another golden disk, which Harry presumed was another door. Brandok again muttered something, and the door opened, revealing a large circular chamber, lighted by a single emerald orb on the dome which served as a ceiling.

"Harold James Potter your excellencies." Said Brandok respectfully. Harry could see some figures gathered around a circular table in the centre of the room. Prompted by Brandok, he moved to them, while the door echoed shut behind him.

"Please sit down." Said one of the goblins, indicating the only empty chair in the table. Harry sat, his eyes trying to absorb all the details of the 4 goblins around him. "These are Gushend, head goblin warlock, Margok, the official goblin liason with the ministry and Ragnok, the head of Gringotts." Said the one sitting directly opposite him, while indicating each of his comrades in turn. "I am Wundeg, leader of the Goblin Liberation Organization."

"A pleasure to meet you sirs." said Harry.

"Now Mr Potter, I am certain you are wondering why we have called you, a human, to such a meeting." said Wundeg

"It is not exactly an opportunity that many of my kind would get." Answered Harry.

"Certainly. In fact, other than yourself, only Lord Gryffindor, Lord Slytherin and Merlin have met the entire Goblin leadership." Came from the Head of Gringotts, Ragnok. "And you seem to have an unusual relationship with the first two."

"Ragnok is right." Said the warlock Margok. "You are a parselmouth, Slytherin's magical heir and yet you slew Slytherin's basilisk with Gryffindor's sword."

"My great-grandfather forged that sword." Said Ragnok "He made certain that only someone with a just cause should be able to wield it, as well as someone who would hold steadfast by the Goblin race. We have been watching the business dealings between you and my brother Brandok with interest Mr Potter. You have helped the Goblin cause greatly, and Brandok speaks most highly of you. There are some things we should discuss."

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Three gruelling hours of negotiations later, a satisfied Harry watched the goblins leave the room. He was escorted outside into the hall by the leader of the G.L.O, Wundeg.

"Mr Potter." Said the goblin "There is something I would like your opinion on. Please follow me."

The goblin went through a side passage, to a room overlooking an azure pool of liquid. The goblin waved his hand over it, and a map of central Europe appeared.

"There is a certain Vampire Clan in Switzerland, the Rhhyist clan, that has been causing trouble for the traditional goblin communities nestled in the Alps, our ancestral home."

"The Rhhyist clan? Weren't they..." began Harry

"Yes, some of Voldemort's and Grindenwald's greatest supporters. Both of them studied in the clan libraries, which contain some of the greatest secrets of the dark arts, though nobody has ever been permitted full access. The recent movements of the clan mean that there is likely to be Dark Wizard involvement."

"I thought that Vampires did not fight goblins...nor do they venture into the Goblin caverns." Questioned Harry.

"Normally, that would be true. Our two races have co-existed peacefully, save for a few periods of warfare. But since vampires cannot feed on our blood, they must have an ulterior motive to attack us. This is one of the reasons why we suspect wizard involvement. Recently, the Vampires raided one of our convoys. They did not kill anyone, but they stole an important Goblin artefact. How they managed to gain the necessary intel as to where it is, we do not know."

"What kind of artefact?" asked Harry.

"It is a golden orb engraved with runes. Unfortunately, I am not at liberty to disclose its function, for it is a secret known only by our highest sages. I didn't even know it existed prior to it being stolen."



However, I am assured that it could cause us great ruin in the wrong hands. Now, I face the question of how to get it back."

Wundeg waved his hand once more, and the pool changed to a map of a specific area.

"This is where we believe that they have taken this orb. However, we do not have enough information about its defences and mounting an assault would mean large casualties...there is also the matter of the ministry..."

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After briefing Harry on the entire situation for almost half an hour, Wundeg turned back to look at him.

"As you can see, this is quite a dire situation. We were wondering if you could help us by gathering some information from the ministry and persuading Dumble..."

"I'll get the orb" cut in Harry. The goblin's eyes widened.

"What? But the area is full of troops! An army would have difficulty..."

"A spy would work better than an army. Trust me on this Wundeg, I will be able to do this."

"I think you are marching to your death Mr Potter. I would strongly advise you to reconsider."

"Oh, but death can no longer touch me" said Harry smirking, his eyes shining.

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With a flash of light, Harry Potter landed in the middle of the reception area of Gringotts in Zurich.

"Mr Potter?" asked one of the nearby Goblins, while the others regarded with curiosity this thirteen-year old boy that had been sent to them.

“Yes, and who do I have the pleasure of speaking to?”

“Commander Burlic sir. Wundeg has instructed me to provide you with all information on the vampire camp and give you what assistance we can.” Said the Goblin smiling.

“You do not need to follow me into combat. Stealth will be the focus of this operation.”

“Maybe, but I am sure you would benefit from some of our weapons.” continued Burlic smiling with glee at the thought of charred vampires.

“Weapons?” asked Harry curiously. He knew that the goblins had a different brand of magic, but no-one knew what they fought with.

“This way please.” said one of the other Goblins, leading them to a nearby storeroom.

“Here we are” Burlic pointed at a stack of items on the wall that looked like grenades. “These devices can compress about 40 cubic meters of any gas or liquid into that tiny space. When you release it, it fills up everything around you. We find them very useful when used with substances like kerosene. We have taken the liberty of filling them up with that already. Just make sure you don’t get cooked as well.”

*‘Nice...I wonder if I could fill some up with tear or mustard gas... death eaters defeated by muggle chemical weapons...would be quite entertaining.’*

The goblin continued, gesturing to some small stones inlaid with runes. “These will release a powerful blast of concentrated sunlight. Contrary to muggle myths, it won’t kill them, but it will certainly cause sever sunburns and temporarily blind them....effectively, it means that it will be hard for them to fight back.” Then he turned towards Harry. “You know how to fight with swords Mr Potter?”

“I am not a master, but I am fairly proficient.” Answered Harry, remembering some of the training he undertook under Moody.

“The preferred weapon of a vampire is the blade. They coat them with a specific poison that will paralyse the victim with excruciating pain, much like the cruciatus curse you wizards use. These are antidotes, each one will be good for half an hour or so.” said Burlic, handing him some vials with a clear liquid. “You should also take this” he added, handing him a silver short-sword engraved with twin serpents. “It was commissioned for Lord Slytherin, along with Griffindor’s sword, but we refused to hand it over to him after his betrayal. Since you are the first parselmouth allied to us since, the command feels you should have it.”

“Impressive collection Burlic.” Said Harry appreciatively.

“Oh...I’m sure you will like them...and the other little things we have.” grinned Burlic.

oOo

Harry moved swiftly over the deep snow in the high peaks of the alps, aided by special skis that the goblins had provided him with. Soon, he arrived at the area the Vampire camp was supposed to be located. Immediately, he felt the already cold air turn even colder, biting into his bone and even his soul.

*‘Dementors. Great.’* He groaned inwardly.

He moved with even greater caution to the edge of a nearby pile of snow. Waving his wand he conjured some heat-sensitive binoculars and looked with them at the distance. After looking through them for a few minutes, he banished them and tried to keep himself from smashing his head on the frozen snow.

*‘Vampires are dead! They emit no heat! And neither do dementors! Idiot Idiot Idiot!’* he thought, and then muttered another charm, making his eyes sensitive to magic auras. Immediately, the area in front of him filled with spheres of black and deep crimson, corresponding to the dementors and the vampires.

He disillusioned himself and cast a silencing charm on him, and then moved slowly towards the building.

*'Dorre! Dorre!'* He shouted in his mind, silently forcing the two vampires guarding a door in front of him into a deep sleep. He disposed of some of the equipment he was carrying, using his wand to bury it deep under the snow. He moved into the stone building, passing strange defence mechanisms. He stopped when he heard some footsteps in front of him.

Two wizards appeared, followed by three vampires. Harry grabbed one of the sunlight-producing stones from his pocket, and launched it towards the group, while at the same time closing his eyes and shouting the activation word.

With a flash of light, the Vampires were writhing on the floor, while the wizards were grabbing the eyes and swearing in some Nordic tongue.

*'Sectumsempra!'* cast Harry, making one of the wizards fall down into a rapidly growing pool of his blood.

"AVADA KEDAVRA!" came from the other wizard who had apparently recovered already.

Harry flicked his wand, pulling one of the vampires into the path of the curse. Despite being already dead, it seemed to die again, as it stopped its screaming. Harry slashed his wand with fury, making the wizards head explode, filling the nearby area with blood.

Meanwhile, the two remaining vampires stood up, a crazed bloodlust in their eyes, and charged at Harry with inhuman speed, wielding their swords.

Fast as they were, they couldn't match up to Harry's magic. He conjured a few dozen knives and sent them to the Vampires. One of them managed to dodge, only getting hit by one in the shoulder. The other one however wasn't so lucky, and his legs were completely penetrated by two knives, while three more sunk to the hilt in his chest and stomach. It fell to the floor, clutching its stomach and was soon engulfed by a fireball.

The last vampire glanced at Harry hatefully, looking for a chance to attack. The only thing it got was a barrage of curses it had to dance away from, until it was finally hit by a bone-shattering curse in the

chest and it fell, chocking black blood as its lungs collapsed. Its suffering did not last long, as Harry promptly turned it into a burning corpse.

Harry leaned on the wall for a minute, recovering his breath, and moved on along the dark corridor. He found a large door and opened it marginally, peeking into the room. Paling, he closed it as fast as possible without making any noise.

*'Maybe it would be better to pick a route that doesn't pass through a gathering of a few hundred vampires.'*

He backed up the corridor, choosing a side passageway instead. He came face to face with a wizard, who looked at him amused

"Where is what you are guarding?" Harry asked menacingly.

"Like I'm going to tell you kid." Laughed the wizard, reaching for his wand, only to find it was already in Harry's hand.

"Silencio, Crucio" said Harry in quick succession. The man fell to the floor, his mouth open in an inaudible scream.

"Finite Incantatem. I will not ask again, where is it?" he snarled, his eyes unknowingly lighting up with an emerald fire.

"In the dungeons. Past the nesting grounds." Said the wizard fearfully.

"Avada Kedavra." said Harry, moving on, the man's body prone behind him.

*'Nesting Grounds...that doesn't sound good.'* He thought as he sent a rope down a nearby chute.

He climbed down to the end of the rope, jumping over the blood-stained spikes on the floor and landing in the nearby gravel. Suddenly, something within him told him to fall to the floor, and he flattened himself on the ground, two sickly green curses passing inches from his head.

“Infernus!” he called, slashing his wand towards the source of the spells. In the light of the fire, he saw some robed figures, one of which was rapidly trying to extinguish the flames eating up his robes. A second later, the wizard fell to his knees, his throat constricting painfully. Before the other wizard could react, he too had fallen, his heart fatally stopping its beating.

Harry did not have time to celebrate however, as his shoulder exploded with pain. Wincing, he whipped around, sending sharp fragments of glass to the witch, who clutched her bloody eyes, screaming.

“Sectumsempra” whispered Harry, cutting short her screams. He conjured some bandages wrapping them tightly around his fractured shoulder. He walked on along the dark tunnel, reaching a point where it forked into two different routes. Gambling on his luck, he picked the left one.

He moved for a long time, meeting no-one. He started wondering whether he had picked an abandoned tunnel, when he felt a familiar chilling cold.

“Expecto Patronum!” he called, focusing on the world he was guarding. A blinding white stag burst from his wand, charging towards the creatures. To his surprise however, some mist appeared as well, focusing into some large cat-like shape, before vanishing.

Harry shook his head, disregarding the figure, and moved along the path that his patronus had carved through the dementors. He held his breath, as if that would help him keep his head clear against the influence of the dark figures to his sides.

*‘At least the dementors keep the other wizards at a certain distance. It would be hard to fight both of them at once.’*

He glanced at his wristwatch, and drank some more anti-venom to protect him from vampire attacks. He strided across the remaining tunnel space, reaching a large engraved stone door. He opened it, and crept slowly across a gigantic hall, full of columns which disappeared into the darkness, as the ceiling couldn’t be seen. He could hear the screeches of bats, and it unnerved him. At one end of

the hall, he saw an opening that stood out against the surroundings, perhaps because of the heavy wrought iron door that stood there.

He cast some strong spells, bursting through the powerful locking charms on the door, and peeked in. There was no opposition there. He went in, glancing across the papers and books that looked centuries old. Finally, he located the goblin orb and picked it up, stuffing it into his pocket. He turned to leave, knowing he had little time left, when a blood covered tome drew his attention.

The strange text on the book looked almost like Arabic, yet Harry could see that it was no language a muggle could speak. As his eyes moved across the lining of the book, the words suddenly and magically became clear to him.

*'Serpent Purity? Slytherin wrote this?'* he carefully cast preservation charms on the tome, and wrapped it carefully with some cloths. Looking around him once more, he left the room. Once he stepped outside what was presumably a silencing charm in the room, he heard a blaring sound all around him.

*'Bloody Hell!'* he cursed, and burst into a run. With the corner of his eye, he could see countless figures moving around him, and curses fracturing the stone ground. Suddenly, his road was cut by 20 vampires, while several more surrounded him from all sides. Harry could also hear the voices of wizards muttering and could literarily feel the wand-points concentrated on him.

"Hand it ober!" said a voice with a heavy accent.

.--.

Sorry Sorry Sorry.....I know this took way too long...but it is almost as if I drunk a bad luck potion....first, my computer's memory crashed, and I lost the chapter I wrote. Then, I had to go on holiday, so I couldn't write much, and when I returned, my internet connection had problems and I had a mounting level of work. I know, excuses are not acceptable....and I am so evil I left you on a cliff-hanger...but the next chapter will be up shortly.

## Chapter 14 – Burning Light

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He drew one up into the air in a signal of peace, put his wand on the floor, and reached into his robes until he felt some objects against his hand. He grabbed all his light producing stones, and launched them into the air, shouting the incantation, as the shouts from those surrounding him filled his ears.

At the same time, he closed his eyes and fell to the hard, cold granite floor, grabbing his wand and rolling away from the curses that hit the place he was standing seconds before.

As the light started subsiding, he cast a strong shield, and reached for the kerosene filled containers he had. He ran at full speed towards the screaming and very pissed-off vampires blocking his way, and, after casting a flame repellent charm, launched the containers to the nearest torches.

The effect was phenomenal. A 40 meter sphere of kerosene covered the hall, and promptly turned into a blazing red inferno, consuming the bodies of any creature unlucky enough to be caught in it.

Harry felt the scorching heat of the fireball clash with his magical shield, sparks flying all around him. Struggling against the enormous strain, he pushed past the columns of fire and went into the stone passageway ahead of him.

Ignoring the sharp pain in his leg, caused by a desperate lunge from a burning vampire moments before, he ran as fast as he could, the



fire behind him lighting his way, the orange and red lights locked in an intricately fatal dance.

In the background, he could still hear a blazing siren, signalling to the world that he was here and needed to be dealt with...promptly. Some unlucky people found him then and tried to do just that.

“Fortis, Sectumsempra, Pulsus!” he cried, blasting the three surprised wizards that stood in his way. He ran past their bodies, firing fireballs and explosion curses ahead of him. He came to a larger cave, and immediately ducked behind some rocks, with three killing curses striking the place where he was located minutes before.

“Serpensontia, Serpensontia.” He whispered, conjuring two large black-scaled cobras. Attack he ordered, hissing in parseltongue.

The two snakes launched themselves at the wizards, who stepped back, a mixture of surprise and fear in their faces. The distraction gave Harry the time to launch a barrage of curses, sending two of them to the underworld.

The last one managed to duck in time, and vanished the two snakes. “Avada Kedavra!” he called, but Harry had already moved away, and the wizard soon found a sword poking through his throat.

*‘Trainees’ thought Harry with a slight disdain ‘You’d think they would get some people with experience to guard such a facility’*

He cast some powerful illusion charms on his body, and climbed up the nearby stairwell. He came to a large corridor, and crept slowly across it. Soon, he ducked into the shade behind a column and held his breath as about 50 vampires and 20 wizards ran past the place he was hiding.

He watched them, his stomach clenched, as they disappeared around the corner, and let out a sigh of relief. His body tensed again however, when he felt something behind him. Whipping around, he instinctively raised his sword, blocking the vampire that tried to cut his head in two. Pushing back with all his strength, he managed to throw the vampire off him, and with a quick curse, he spread its brains all over the floor.

He stood there, trying to catch his breath, for about 5 seconds, but his heart started beating frantically when he heard the sounds of the battle group that had just passed returning, having heard the commotion.

He turned around the nearest corner, an arrow of fire singing the edge of his robes as it whizzed by him. Still, he knew that they would soon overtake him, so he pointed his wand up to the ceiling and, concentrating all his magic, bellowed:

“EXPLODRA!”

A column of red light came from his wand, which shook under the force of the magic channelled through it. The ceiling cracked, and soon came tumbling down with a roar, while Harry desperately tried to get away from the falling stones and dust. From what he could hear from the other side of the tunnel, it seemed like some of the vampires weren't as lucky.

With one last, fleeting glance at the blocked passage, he ran on ahead, until he reached a large steel door. He tried opening it, it wouldn't budge. Tiredly, he pointed his wand at the door and concentrated heavily.

With a bang, he sent the door flying, creating a small flaming hole in the ground, 20 meters away. Under the mass of steel, he saw a vampiric hand writhing helplessly.

*‘Well, that should teach them not to sit behind doors.’* He thought humorously, and ran into the nearby tunnels. Once he was relatively safe, judging from the fact that most of the troops in the camp had gone to the treasury to search for the “Invaders.”

As he walked on, he noticed the stone walls slowly giving way to earth and gravel.

*‘Must be in some abandoned area...just as well, they’ve probably blocked all the exits by now...If I walk far enough, I might manage to get out of the anti-apparition wards.’* He thought, as he absentmindedly kicked a spare stone from his path.

Eventually the torches became fewer and fewer, and soon Harry conjured a floating orb of light to follow him around. He reached a cave where there were 3 different routes for him to take.

“Maculus” he muttered, twirling his wand towards the ceiling. A large red mark appeared, the light from his orb reflecting off it making it an odd shade of crimson.

Satisfied with his work, Harry softly said: “Point me north” and took the northernmost passage, remembering from the maps he had seen that north would lead away from the facility and the mountain, and most likely to an area outside the wards.

He walked on. And on, and on, and on. The tunnel became moist, and the constant dripping of water echoed in the tunnels. Soon, it turned into a roaring thunder as Harry found himself at a ledge overlooking an underground river, carrying tonnes of molten snow from the Alpine peaks.

Harry briefly considered whether jumping into the river with a combination of heating, bubblehead and shield charms would help him get out, but finally decided against it, saving it as a measure of last resort.

Continuing north, he slowed his pace when he heard whispered voices. Vanishing the orb of light following him, he let his eyes adjust to the dark and crept forwards.

He heard one of the wizards nearby moaning, catching only spare words like Ich hasse. Another one responded with something that Harry did not hear, causing the first one to laugh. Pointing at the direction of the sound, Harry soon had them both disarmed and bound.

He walked up to them. The first one was fairly young, and looked at him with hatred and fear. Gambling on the chances that this was a fairly raw recruit and had little formal training in protecting his mind, Harry jabbed his wand towards the wizard’s forehead, shouting “Legilimens!”

He filed through the young man's brain, but got only disjointed images at first. Impatient and enraged, he thrust his magic in a form very much like the cruciatius curse, raping the wizard's brain to gain the necessary information. Once satisfied, he released the wizard from his hold, letting him fall to the ground, his heart still beating but his mind forever gone.

The man next to him had stared in terror while the boy's eyes turned crimson and his comrade screamed before falling dead. Now, he watched the boy turn its gaze on him, and the last thing he saw was a green flash of light before he too fell dead.

Harry left the two bodies behind, and run through narrow, twisting paths in what looked almost like a maze, having etched a map of the area in his head. He finally came to a spot where roots were dangling from the ceiling, spider-webs perched amongst them. Finding an area relatively clear of routes, he pressed his wand against the cold soil and yelled "Explodra!"

A rain of stone and earth came tumbling down towards him, but his magic batted it easily to the side. Soon, the earth turned into frozen snow, and Harry Potter was staring at a clear night sky.

Conjuring a fur cloak to protect him from the cold, he climbed outside the hole his spell had opened, his fingers protesting against the icy feel of the snow they were buried in. Harry ignored them and ploughed a path through the snow with his wand, moving as fast as he could.

Once he moved for about five kilometres, he felt himself exiting the anti-apparition wards, and concentrated on the nearest branch of Gringotts. With a loud crack and a sigh of relief, Harry Potter left behind the masses of snow in the Alps.

oOo

"We cannot even begin to show our gratitude for your help today Mr Potter" said a Goblin sage for what Harry felt was the 100th time.

He was sitting in a large and comfortable bed deep within London's Gringotts, his wounds treated by a team of unusually eager Goblin

medics. Their methods, while rather...unique by wizarding standards, were nonetheless effective.

"We have healed your injuries Mr Potter." Said one of the medics, before frowning and continuing hesitantly: "Yet it seems that your core may have been damaged by some curse...there is a rift in it, almost as if something tried to make it split into two. It already shows signs of healing, and we believe that given time and rest it should reunite. There seem to be some residues of a dark infection, but they are rapidly dissipating."

*'Probably my cores are merging...I didn't know they could check that type of thing.'* Thought Harry, while saying: "Thank you doctor. I'll make sure to follow your advice."

He felt a slight headache as he lowered his occulmency shields a bit, with the purpose of relaxing. *'Everything seems so jumbled in there'* he reflected. *'I'll have to resort my mind defences and magical connections sometime soon...I haven't checked on them since I arrived here...'* he continued, while he slipped off the hospital bed and was directed to a changing room by the goblins.

He slipped on his robes, which after the cleaning and repairing they had undergone, looked better than when he had bought them. *'Almost like silk'* he reflected, while watching the black fabric slip over his arms.

*'I really need to train...after all, my magic is like a muscle, nothing can substitute work, not even a gigantic infusion of a second core...just like a child's core needs to be tamed, though unconsciously, to stop its release of wild magic, I have to discipline and cultivate myself...add that to a restructuring of my pathways and learning something other than battle magiks...'* feeling the onset of a headache once more, he stopped.

It was almost as if he had some form of magical adrenaline, which kept him going before, but now he wanted nothing more than to sink into the nearest bed. Feeling the weight of the stolen Slytherin book in his pocket, he left Gringotts bank.

*'It was almost like a test' he told his body, which was complaining heavily 'They wanted to see how strong and committed I am...I wanted to see whether I can do this...and I couldn't let the orb be taken by Voldemort.'*

The orb, or the Gwahri-Keina as it came to be known in his old timeline, was truly a powerful device. Voldemort had never figured out how to use it properly, for that knowledge was forever lost in time, but he had managed to reverse engineer it into a ghastly device that had ended the last hopes of wizarding Britain to win the war against him...

He could still remember it...the proud faces of wizards who had come from every corner of the commonwealth. For once, it stood united, the disagreements between its ministries forgotten, as by now every nation faced war.

Unlike its muggle counterpart, magical Europe still held its colonies, and by extension a great sway over the globe. Some had broken away after the first great magical war with Grindewald, but there were still enough to amass a force of 1,000 wizards, almost a tenth of the population of Magical Britain itself. Add that to the increasing number of muggleborns, which were beginning to match purebloods, and you had an actual army.

Well, any muggle general would have scoffed at it, calling it a 'rag-tag militia' at best, and 'some protesters with wands' at worst. Still, for the people harried by the violence of the dark lord, it was a symbol of a new age, their liberation army.

Perhaps one of the first real wizarding armies to ever exist, considering that up to now, "wars" were mostly duels between small number of wizards, with the occasional appearance of magical creatures to aid them. Still, the wizarding world was too small to have standing armies, only some small, harried and overextended police forces and gangs. Which was one of the reasons why the notion of such a large force banding together made people so confident of victory.

Granted, Voldemort had his supporters as well...a large force from the continent which had largely fallen under his grasp, various native wizards and tribes which detested the control of the ministry...many

elitists which hated their muggle cousins. Voldemort outnumbered them by far. Yet they still had hope.

A hope that was blasted away along with most of Paris at the turn of the millennium. The goblin orb was destroyed as well, but Voldemort had no need of it, as most of the resistance in Britain and the rest of Europe dissipated at this time.

Now however, the orb would stay with the goblins. And perhaps, seeing as he had their allegiance, he would manage to find some other use for it...

He broke off his train of thoughts as he noticed a shadow moving ahead of him. Instinctively, he had his wand pointed at the shadow, but relaxed when he noticed that it was just a stray cat.

Seeing the first rays of light coming from the horizon, he decided it would be best to get to sleep as soon as possible, and blame his late rising on teenage laziness.

He levitated himself into the apartment via the window and crept along the floor to his room. He took off his robe, tossing it at a nearby chair, and turned to dismantle the illusion he had placed on his bed before lying down.

The illusion that *wasn't there*.

Suddenly, the magical torches lighted up to their full intensity.

"It's about time." said a stern looking Sirius Black, who was sitting heavily in a green armchair.

"Oh...er...hello Sirius, didn't see you there." said Harry feebly.

"Obviously. Now where have you been?"

"Well...around..." offered Harry.

"Don't give me that! Do you know how worried I've been?"

“Don’t be so serious Sirius!” said Harry, making an attempt at a joke “It’s not like you weren’t outside at times like this at my age!”

“Well, that was at Hogwarts” countered Sirius, though Harry could see the brief flicker of a smile in his face. “It was much safer there!”

“It’s not like I walked into a dark wizard camp...what kind of marauder are you anyway?”

“Don’t try to make me the subject matter here! I promised James that I would take care of you if anything happened, and I fully intend to do so!” declared Sirius, his voice rising.

“Well, you do not have to act like a mother hen! Okay, so I was outside having some fun, it looks like I inherited my father’s penchant for trouble, is it that bad?”

“Don’t you understand how worrying it is? Especially after all the time you spent in the hospital wing last year, I have to make sure you are alright.” said the man, his features softening.

“I’m sorry for making you worried Sirius.” said Harry softly “You don’t need to worry about me...after all, if I can take on a Basilisk, there isn’t much that can stop me is there?”

“Maybe.” he offered, rising. “Now go to sleep young man, we’ll talk more about this tomorrow.”

With a groan, Harry fell on his bed, asleep before his head hit the pillow.

*oOo*

In the end, after some long discussions, Harry was forced to stay in the apartment for a week. Though he could have broken the tracking charms Sirius placed on him easily, he decided not to escalate the tensions.

But he did unleash a flurry of pranks, which helped aid his claims that he was following his father’s path by being outside. It reached such an extent, that in the end a dripping wet Sirius with pink hair shouted



that he would report Harry to the ministry for use of underage magic if he carried on.

Even if Harry doubted he would go that far.

As the summer rolled on, tensions calmed down and their relationship was restored to normal. Harry eventually had the freedom to stay outside for fairly extended periods of time, though he had to be back at a reasonable time.

Harry developed quite a liking to the fine cuisine that the goblins offered, much to Sirius's dismay, as he now found that he often had to cook his own charred excuses for lunch in his godson's absence. Not that he knew where the boy ate, despite his numerous enquiries.

As the end of August rolled around, Harry managed to convince his godfather to let him visit the Weasleys for the run-up to his birthday. He grudgingly let him go, and the red-head family was more than happy to accept him.

Which is why today, while waking up, he was faced with a blinding sea of orange. He covered his eyes, groaning with an internal battle of whether to get up or not, when his nose captured the tell-tale scent of breakfast. Loosing any compunction he had, he threw his covers off and ran to the bathroom.

After he finished with his morning activities, he left, finding a very irate Ginny Weasley in the corridor, looking as if she wanted to burn a hole in the wooden wall.

"What's wrong?" he inquired, stopping right on the frayed red carpet.

"That woman!" she said in a furious whisper, her eyes shining with a hidden fire. "I just can't take it! Its like she's trying to tie my up with her apron until I have no personality! Just because she couldn't fulfil her ambitions herself or through dad she expects me to do it for her! She...she...she's a bully!" she ranted.

"Well, at least this has made you develop your slyness and your Slytherin talents." offered Harry.

"I would have had those without her strangling me! On the one hand I have her trying to make me into a new perfect Percy and on the other hand I have the twins trying to make me into their carbon copies. They act like I am property! No consideration for my own personality." She went on, her hair arranged in a halo of fire around her, while her expression reminded him of an angry tiger.

"Caught in the battlefield aren't you?"

"I tried laying low for the past, but it is like she has a claim on me! And it gets worse with Hogwarts...stop smiling like that! It isn't funny!" she said, turning towards him and giving him a playful punch on the shoulder.

*'Seems like the diary made them lay off her in the past world...here, she has fallen in the middle of the battle...oh poor Arthur, why did you have to fall in love with muggle gadgets?'*

"Don't worry. I'm sure it'll be alright."

"Once I get back to Hogwarts, it will be better...but for now she's gone ballistic...you'd think that after winning the lottery and going to Egypt she might calm down, but even Bill seemed scared of her!" She sighed, looking almost resigned and apprehensive, if it wasn't for the steel glint in her eyes that made it clear in no uncertain terms that she wouldn't submit to her Mother's will.

"That bad?"

"He got an earring...you should have heard Mom scream! She turned on me when I tried to defend him...she's been treating us all like babies for the past week. Oh well. I'll certainly show her when the Shades rule over all of Britain!" she exclaimed triumphantly, raising her fist in the air.

"What about the twins?"

"I don't really worry about them...they are only trying to make sure I don't become a creature with no will, even if their way is rather...energetic. I quite like living with them on normal

days...though normal and the Twins don't really go very well together."

"Wait until you're older...then you will have even more pressure." offered Harry wisely.

"Oh, I'm sure we are more than capable of taking care of that Harry. Now, you should come downstairs, Mom shouted something about calling you down before I left." she prepared to bounce off, visibly happier, before she stopped.

"By the way Harry, I need your help."

"Why certainly my fair princess. What dragon needeth slaying?" asked Harry in a fake Victorian Accent.

Ginny let out a snort. "I could take on the dragon myself! I need you to teach me occulmency."

"Are you sure? Most minds are not sufficiently organised for it before the age of 16..."

"Well, we can always try. I've made some progress on my own, but I am beyond the stage where a few books can help me." she offered, folding her hands.

"Hmm...Allow me?" he offered, extending his wand. At Ginny's nod, he whispered "Legilimens!" sending a soft mind nudge in her direction.

After a brief struggle, he started seeing some disjointed images of her childhood. He quickly retreated.

"You felt it right?" he asked Ginny, who was now panting.

"Felt it? What was that? It was overwhelming!" she said furiously.

"Well, most wizards aren't as powerful as me, so you should find stopping them easier. You are good for a beginner, but you need work on it."

“Obviously” she said dryly. “So you will help me then?” she asked, now looking uncertain.

“Of course! How could I pass up on an opportunity to find embarrassing material on you?”

Ginny blushed at this, before her look turned into that of a lioness. “Don’t you dare...”

“Oh don’t worry, I’ll do no such thing.” He said, walking towards the stairs. “Though I might ‘accidentally’...”

“POTTER!” she exclaimed in a strained and hushed whisper, her blush deepening.

“Okay, Okay.” Laughed Harry “Come on, let’s eat.”

oOo

“Why not take divination? It will be easy?” whined Ron.

“Boring more like. The old hag that teaches it does nothing other than drawl on and on about death and other misfortunes. Though I suppose it would be amusing to make up predictions for homework.”

“But ancient runes? What would you need THAT for?”

“Many of the cool spells are written or casted in the ancient tongues. And I can’t go around without having those spells now can I?” questioned Harry.

“The only person in that class will be Hermione and a few Ravenclaws...come to think of it, what classes to you think Hermione will take?”

“Probably all of them” said Harry distractedly. He briefly considered the possibility of whether he should warn her about using a time-turner, but decided against it in light of it being a valuable lesson on her limits. Without it, she might continue showing off as an extraordinary student. *‘In fact’* he thought on it further *‘that may very well be the reason McGonagall lets her have it in the first place.’*

“Probably should see if I can set up some kind of healing apprenticeship with Madam Pomfrey” he muttered “heaven knows I’ve spent an inordinate amount of time there...” *‘Plus, it would calm some of the fears about me... healing magic lessons is not something a wannabe dark lord would be prone to take...’*

“Why do you even need to take all this stuff?” complained Ron “You are already better than all of us.”

“Which is why all these classes are so boring...I want something different.” answered Harry, fiddling with a quill whilst pondering on whether or not to start on his witch burning essay. “All these classes look like History of Magic to me.

“But you are still going to take Care of Magical Creatures right?” asked Ron, hopeful that there would be at least one class he would share with his friend.

“Naturally...who wouldn’t want to go around hunting giant beasties? Hagrid’s going to be our new teacher from what I understand...by the way, when you try to buy the book he assigned, pet it in the spine to stop it from going crazy”

“Pet the what?” exclaimed Ron, looking lost.

“The book Ron, the book. Trust me, you’ll know what I’m talking about once you get it.” said Harry yawning and deciding that starting his essay now was abso-bloody-pointless. “Fancy a quidditch game Ron?” he asked the red-head, who was looking at him exasperated.

“Quidditch! Sure!” exclaimed the boy, looking happy to leave the painful subject of school in the dusted depths of memory.

oOo

“Where is Hermione? She said she would be here today.” said Ron, peering around in Diagon alley. The area was uncommonly crowded, as it was August 31 and everyone was desperately doing their last minute shopping.

“Don’t worry, she’ll come.” said Ginny, rolling her eyes “Now come to Olivander’s! Mom said we could buy new wands!”

“I only hope it doesn’t take as long for you as it did for me...and that you don’t get the same surprise I did.” muttered Harry.

“Why, what happened to you?” said Ginny while walking towards the wand shop.

“Creepy old man told me how it is ‘most curious’ I got this wand, because it is the brother wand to the dark lord’s.”

Ginny stopped at this and turned towards him “Really? You know, they say that often people with brother wands share many characteristics...”

“I know.” cut in Harry. “Olivander, in his spooky style, told me that the world can expect great things from me...because Voldemort did great things...terrible, but great. And I am, after all, the greatest wizard in the world!” he finished, striking a victorious pose.

“You certainly have one of the biggest heads in the world” laughed Ginny. “Now come on ‘my lord’, your loyal followers need to get their wands.”

In the end, it took them quite some time get new wands. Ron found a 14 inch willow wand with a unicorn hair-string soon enough, but it took Ginny over half an hour before she acquired a 12 inch alder wand with a dragon heartstring. Harry didn’t miss the strange wind that blew around the shop when she found it, nor did he miss Olivander’s eyes move from her wand to him, with an uncommon calculating glint.

As they left the shop they heard two voices calling their names. They turned, spotting Neville and Hermione running towards them.

“Good to see you” said Ginny smiling “Is that a new cat Hermione?” she asked, pointing at a ginger cat with a bottle-brush tail and what looked like a face that had endured an unfortunate impact with a hammer.

“Yes. He’s Crookshanks. I got him at the menagerie...he was there for so long the poor thing...” she answered, looking sweetly at the cat.

“No wo...” started Ron, but stopped abruptly when Ginny stepped on his foot. “Er, that is an interesting cat.”

“It’s a part Kneazle. Very intelligent, just like Hermione.” offered Harry.

“Really? I didn’t think of that! You’re right.”

“Naturally.” Muttered Ginny under her breath. “Well, where to now?” she asked in a louder voice, placing her hands on her hair and tying it into a bundle.

“Let’s go to Quality Quidditch Supplies!” jumped Ron at the opportunity “I hear they’ve brought this new broom...”

Harry turned towards him. “The firebolt. Pretty good one, Sirius said that he’ll buy it for a Christmas present so I can ‘smash the Slytherins to cinders’.”

“You don’t need a firebolt to do that.” said Ginny.

“No, but it will make it much more fun. Anyway, Mrs Weasley said that we have to go and check you all in at the leaky cauldron.”

“Yes, my parents and I will be staying there too before I leave tomorrow.” added Hermione “we should go there now.”

Ron just followed them, disappointed.

oOo

Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  was bustling with traffic, but a particularly large group, over half of it Red-heads, took up a large portion of the area.

“And remember to obey the number 1 rule:” started Sirius “don’t get caught. Okay?”

“I will, don’t worry my dear ‘dog’father. Though I’ll have a hard time with Remus around, if he knows every trick won’t I?”

“Well, I am sure that I can turn a blind eye...so long as you don't target me.” Offered the brown-haired man.

“Oh, I don't think you have to worry about me. But certain others...” he cast a furtive glance towards the twins, who were discussing something with Lee Thomas.

“Well, I know most of the tricks of the trade, I should be able to handle it.” said Lupin.

“It will probably give them an extra incentive...but anyway, we better get on now.” came from Harry.

The group finished their goodbyes, and boarded the train. Ginny, Harry, Ron, Hermione and Neville quickly scampered off to find a compartment of their own.

They sat, chattering happily and saying hello to various classmates, until the train picked up speed.

“Something wrong?” asked Harry when, halfway through the journey to Hogwarts, he saw Ginny next to him shiver.

“No...just...I felt as if something bad was on the verge of happening, but didn't...strange...” she muttered, trailing off, deep in thought. At that time, the door opened and Malfoy appeared.

Ginny let out a growl and adopted the position of a tiger, ready to pounce. Ron too was glaring towards the Slytherins, but Harry acted before any of them

“Oh, hello Draco. Here, sit down.” said Harry, patting the seat next to him.

The boy looked bewildered for a moment before snapping back. “A Malfoy would never associate with mudbloods and blood-traitors!” he declared.

“Why the social call then?” enquired Harry “We would really value your company.”



At this, the other members of the compartment started at him in shock, except Ginny who was managing to keep a straight face, though Harry could tell she was about to burst from laughter.

“Wh...Well, I wouldn’t value yours!” he half-screamed.

“Oh Draco...a pretty boy like you shouldn’t have those thugs for company.” said Harry, batting his eyelashes “Come...here...I’m sure I can be better...*company*...than them....unless you prefer it with more...*participants*” he continued, sending off some magic and stressing his every word.

Malfoy took a step back, falling into Crabbe and Goyle. He closed the compartment door and left, faster than Harry had ever seen him go.

At that moment, Ginny fell to the floor, clutching her ribs. Harry joined her in laughter a few seconds later. The others looked confused, before letting out some snorts.

“Much as I enjoy cursing him, this is much more fun.” said Ginny, when she got control of her breath again.

“Right you are. Though we could always use both.” answered Harry.

“No need to bully people Harry.” said Hermione, though she didn’t look too opposed to the idea.

The rest of the journey passed without incident, and soon Harry was fast asleep. He was awoken by Ginny as they neared the station, when she shook him and said, with her mouth arranged in a lop-sided smile:

“Harry, stop drooling all over me and get up.”

“Eh? Oh yeah. Sorry.” He said, getting up and rubbing his stiff neck. “I think it’s time to put our robes on isn’t it?”

“Yes...we are almost there.” said Hermione, reaching for her bag and putting her robes over her clothing. The rest of the compartment silently followed her example.

The train stopped, and it was not long before the group found itself in a carriage, on the way to Hogwarts. Harry glanced wearily at the thestrals pulling the carriage, before sinking back on his seat, rubbing his forehead.

Rain was pouring down when they made it to the main doors, which meant that they had to run fast, causing Ron to fall head-first into a puddle of water, much to the group's amusement.

They laughed even more when Filch came along and gave Ron a loud telling-off about staining his floor and walked off muttering "Lousy children...term hasn't even started yet...always up to trouble...should chain them to the wall I say..."

"It isn't funny!" complained Ron, growing increasingly frustrated.

"Oh, for Merlin's sake! Tergeo!" casted Harry, siphoning off all the water, making Ron dry once more. "Well, let's go inside shall we? Dinner shouldn't take too long."

Harry mentally fast-forwarded through the sorting and Dumbledore's speech and his announcement of Hagrid and Remus's new teaching positions, quite happily filling his stomach with the well prepared Hogwarts food the first chance he got.

The feast had finished, and the Gryffindors were slowly getting up for their dorm, when Harry was approached by McGonagall.

"Mr Potter, I would like to have a word with you about your classes." she said.

"Okay professor." answered Harry. He felt the enquiring looks the others gave him and gave them a silent order to go on, so he was left alone with the Gryffindor head of house.

"I understand you expressed a wish to start an apprentice with Madam Pomfrey?" enquired his head of house.

"Certainly professor. I feel that I have considerable talent that is currently untapped."



## Chapter 15 – Shadow's Rise

The magic moved like a missile.

A blazing white missile in what looked like a dark moor. It was not long before it hit a barrier, a wall of hard stone.

Mind struggled against mind, magic against magic, and the foreign invader started steadily opening a hole in his opponent's shields. Briefly, he noticed a stream of gold flickering to his left, but he ignored it as he focused his energies into his invasion.

Finally, after a five minute struggle, he passed through, and the two people fell back into their respective chairs, panting.

"Well." said Harry, whipping his brow "you certainly seem to have made progress. You should be able to hold off most direct assaults from an intermediate legilimens."

"I certainly hope so." whispered Ginny, clutching her head. "I'm sick of getting this bloody headache after every session we have."

"Well Gin." smirked Harry, "That is simply the result of trying to resist the inevitable outcome of me winning." Immediately, he ducked, avoiding the quill chunked at him.

"Anyway." he continued. "It is almost eleven, and I know that training in mind magic is very tiring. I think we best be going to bed."

"You go on." muttered Ginny "I'll stay here. I'm not tired." she said, squaring her jaw. The effect was ruined however, when she yawned deeply.

"Yes you are." said Harry, frowning

"M'fine." she said, nodding off sleepily.

"Why don't you just sleep?"

"I...get these dreams whenever my mind is weak like this...I really don't like them."

“You mean nightmares?” he asked, now concerned.

“Yes...it is full of fighting and death...I...you...we are all fighting...and there is blood everywhere.” she said, shivering.

“Sounds pretty bad.” said Harry, while gears turned around in his head. *‘Maybe these exercises are weakening her mind to the point where the subconscious, and its fears, have no resistance while she sleeps and take over...’* “Why don’t you take any dreamless sleep potion?”

“I’ve tried, but I can only take so much without Madam Pomfrey getting suspicious...plus, if I take it too often, I’ll have to deal with side-effects that are worse than nightmares...don’t worry, it is better if I let my mind clear up a bit before sleeping” she said, gazing at the crackling fire-place.

“Hmmm...tell you what, I can make a draught that should help you a bit...” he said, thinking back to the mixture he used to make to help him with headaches induced by Voldemort’s glee at his increasingly frequent nights of terror – before he learnt occlumency, naturally. *‘I think I probably have some left over from that ritual I did last week...’*

“Come on, let’s go.” he said, pulling the redhead of her feet, and pulling the invisibility cloak over them. They left from the room of requirement, and moved along the seventh floor corridor to the fat lady, who, annoyed at being woken up, irritably let the invisible duo in.

“Wait here.” said Harry, while Ginny sunk into one of the plush red armchairs, looking longingly at the staircases that loomed at the other side of the room.

5 minutes later, he returned, a bottle of a thick yellowish liquid in his hand. “Here, drink this.” he said, handing her the bottle.

She took a sip, and scrunched her nose at the taste. “Does it have to be so bad tasting?” she whined playfully.

“All medical potions have a bad taste Gin...you just have to endure it.”

"Torturer." she said, before downing the entire thing in one go. "Mmm...that feels a little better" she said, her eyes clearing. "Thank you Harry. I guess I'll be going up now. Hopefully I won't be watching people with red slits for eyes throwing stuff at me or cackling women sending green lights to my direction this time..."

"That is what you see?" asked Harry, surprised.

"Yes...probably your fault anyway, with all these stories you tell us whenever there is a Shade training session...you've scarred me for life now." She said, giving him a mock scowl.

"Awww...poow babwy." said Harry mockingly.

"Ahh...but you'll just have to watch out for my revenge!" she exclaimed, waving her wand teasingly. "Beware of the ides of September Potter! I'm going to get you tomorrow!" she said, her voice deepening. She stopped when she let out another yawn. "Anyway, goodnight Harry." she said, bouncing up the stairs.

"G'night." called Harry after her, feeling his own tiredness overtaking him. He turned to his own dorm, and jumped under the covers, gratefully surrendering his mind to the peaceful darkness.

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"Oh no...we have divination again..." groaned Ron the next morning, after he had cleared the perimeter of food.

"What?" said Harry amused "Not to your liking?"

"Trel...Professor Trelawney is....she is crazy!" said Neville "First she predicts my death on the very first lesson..."

"Oh come on you big baby. I though you were over that." cut in Ginny

"Alright, so I'm not dying anytime soon....but she is just...creepy...keeps on muttering about dark and evil stuff happening...about her 'inner eye'..." he continued.

"I don't really think she's a good teacher. She doesn't really....know...anything." commented Hermione, in a strained voice.

"Do not underestimate her." offered Harry, pleased that Hermione was finally able to speak against figures of authority. "While she may not be a competent divination teacher, she *is* a seer...though her predictions are few and far between...and always spell doom...." he trailed off, absentmindedly twirling the piece of bacon stabbed by the end of his fork.

"What?" asked Ron, confused.

"Oh nevermind. You should have listened to me when I said it was a useless class..."

"Yea...now, you have Healing lessons...lucky git." snorted Neville.

"They are not that nice...Madam Pomfrey keeps on harping about ethical treatment of patients and what questions to ask...It is like a History of Magic lesson...I never get to do anything...though hopefully that will change eventually." contemplated Harry.

"Still better than Divination I reckon. Well, at least we can make up our homework for that." said Ron. Hermione shifted uncomfortably at this, but said nothing.

At that point, Malfoy passed, glaring at Harry. Harry waved to him and shouted loudly with a smile "Good Morning Draco! Why don't you come join us?"

The Slytherin's scowl deepened, and he ducked into the seats by his house table. The students that had heard Harry looked between the two in a slight shock.

"Still not over last week is he?" asked Ginny.

"Maybe...but then again, it may just be normal for him to have a stick up his arse..." said Harry, his mind turning back to the events of last week.

**/FLASHBACK/**

Harry watched dispassionately as the students lined up in front of Hagrid's hut, Malfoy and the Slytherin's around him muttering under their breaths, no doubt about the hut's condition or insulting the intelligence of Hagrid.

He frowned when he saw Malfoy's lips form something that looked like "As bad as a mudblood", but he didn't stir from the tree he was leaning.

His friends, seeing him, decided not to pick a fight either, though Ron required Ginny's hand on his shoulder to refrain from charging over when a comment of "How did that rancid oaf get to be a teacher of all things?"

Finally, the mutterings fell to a lower level when Hagrid came out. After noting that they would be doing Hippogriffs, Harry let his attention wander to examining the students, or rather, Malfoy's group. The blonde was sniggering about something, and a smirk came into Harry's face. He crept closer, unnoticed, until he was very close to the blonde. He stopped the shades from following him with a wave of his hand. He turned back to Hagrid, just as the latter said:

"Now, firs' thing yeh gotta know abou' hippogriffs is , there're proud. Easily offended, hippogriffs are. Don't never insult one, 'cause it might be the last thing yeh do."

"Hope you heard that Draco...we wouldn't want....any 'unfortunate' accidents to happen...I would be heartbroken to attend your funeral." whispered Harry. The blonde jumped and whirled around.

"POTTER.." began the boy.

"Oy! Quiet back there!" said Hagrid, his eyes clouding with confusion when he saw Harry standing next to Malfoy. As Harry's wink, he shot him a strange look, before continuing with his speech.

Finally, they came to a point where Hagrid asked for a volunteer to ride one of the Hippogriffs, Buckbeak. The class looked hesitant, but Harry just winked at Malfoy.



“Wish me luck” he said, before bounding off to a relieved Hagrid. He faced the noble creature, bowing respectfully. It stared at him contemplatively for a long time, and Hagrid tried to pull Harry away, but he stood his ground, his eyes never leaving Buckbeak’s. Eventually, the creature gave a bow, and soon he was back in one of his favourite places, the air.

Granted, flying on a hippogriff is not the same as riding a broom, but every form of flying is exhilarating.

When Harry landed, the class seemed much less fearful of the Hippogriffs, and many of them were soon making their own attempts at riding a hippogriff.

And, naturally, Malfoy couldn’t keep his tongue under leash.

"This is very easy. I knew it must have been, if Potter could do it ... I bet you're not dangerous at all, are you? Are you, you ugly great brute?" he said, sneering at the hippogriff.

“Accio Malfoy!” shouted Harry, quick as lighting, and Malfoy sped towards him, the hippogriff lunging at his face and missing it by inches.

“That thing tried to kill me!” shouted the pale boy “It’s dangerous! I almost died!”

Hagrid paled at this, and pulled Buckbeak back into the pen, but Harry just turned to Malfoy, calmly.

“So, you owe me a life debt then? Oh how...*nice*...”

Malfoy cast a dark look at Harry, his face scrunched in inner conflict between getting Hagrid in trouble and accepting that he owed a life-debt, *any debt*, to *Potter*.

“Hmmpf” he finally snorted “That *thing* wouldn’t be able to do anything. It is just an ugly pile of dragon dung, I had it under control.” He said, stalking off to his Slytherin classmates.

**/END FLASHBACK/**

“Anyway” said Ron, gulping down the last piece of omelette. “We’d better get doing. It’s all the way up in the North Tower after all. See you in Defence Harry.”

“Good luck guys. I guess I’ll just enjoy my free period now.” Said Harry, waving to Ron, Hermione and Neville. Soon, Ginny left too, for her Transfiguration lesson.

Harry cleared the last vestiges of food from his plate, and left the great hall. He went up the staircase to the second floor and, after casting a look around him, entered the second floor bathroom.

“Open” he hissed to one of the sinks, and he stepped back as the entrance to the chamber of secrets was revealed.

He slid down the tunnel, falling onto his knees amidst the myriad bones, which crunched under his feet. Casting a few quick scourgify’s, he cleared the slime from his robes, and he followed the tunnel to the main chamber.

He made his way to a serpent-encrusted altar in the far end of the chamber. He opened the dusty book that was placed on it, and, drawing some papers from his pocket, began to read it.

*‘Let’s see if I got this right...It isn’t enough that Salazar wrote this damned book in parseltongue, he had to use all these runes and encode it as well...talk about being paranoid.’* He thought, making his way through each fragile page and writing down notes in his papers.

After almost 2 months of hard work, he thought he had managed to break the code, and was now eagerly absorbing the information in the book

He skimmed past the sections that talked about wizard Politics and “proper” wizard upbringing. Interesting as they might be, he was sure that they had been copied in countless old books. He eyed the Dark Spells listed in the book with interest, but they were not anything exceptionally powerful, even if they were very...creative in nature. Especially the one that turned the opponent’s blood into acid.

Finally, he came along the part where Slytherin detailed his experiments on various dark rituals. Smirking, he started decoding them, certain that he would find something.

He shuffled through the various notes detailing the power-networks that Slytherin worked on, and found some that looked oddly like the imperius curse. Reflecting upon it, Harry decided that it was quite likely that Salazar produced the imperius curse as an offshoot of this research.

It seemed that what Salazar had been designing failed. An attempt at building a dark army, it was supposed make the people it was performed on more powerful magically, physically stronger, more acute mentally and, above all, bound and loyal to the caster.

But Slytherin had run into a lot of problems. First, he found that the ritual would never work with a fully developed human mind, as even the slightest resistance would mean that it would fail. And, no matter how loyal a follower was, their mind would still subconsciously resist the foreign magic.

*'Probably resulted in quite a lot of wizards on the floor under the cruciatus...Slytherin was so steeped in dark magic by that time that he was almost uncontrollable in his rage.'*

Trying it on still-developing infants, in their mother's womb (Harry unconsciously shivered at this), Salazar found that the magical core of a child resisted the ritual, thereby dooming it to fail.

Desperate to find some way of making research bear fruit, Salazar turned towards animals, but found that, with the absence of magical channels in someone's body, the ritual would simply overload the system and kill the organism.

*'That rules out muggles too'* thought Harry unhappily.

In despair, Slytherin had turned towards the only things that had no will and no cores, yet still had channels: Dead Wizards. The zombies he raised that way wreaked a lot of havoc on England at that time, and created the first tales of the dead rising from their graves.

Eventually, generations of Dark Wizards fine tuned those zombies into today's inferi.

But Harry could still see Slytherin's bitterness pouring out of the paper. The dark wizard felt that much of the ritual's power was wasted on the zombies, and, defeated, he had went on to create a new one, much weaker, but one that would be more efficient on the dead.

Harry frowned, going over all of Slytherin's detailed notes again. He saw an approach that Slytherin had not considered.

Squibs. During Salazar's time, they were almost unknown, and regarded as cursed babies. Even now, there had to about 1000 squibs in the entire world. It would be impossible to identify one before they are born but it was a possibility....and after all, as Squibs were able to handle magical items, they could use many of the devices that the twins or the goblins had produced in Harry's old timeline.

But still....getting them while they were unborn would be hard, at the most producing 2-3 followers....and since they had no magic, they wouldn't make particularly strong soldiers. Enchanting them wouldn't work that well either...the only way for this to work, he reflected, was if he could somehow create life....but he was no god...

He broke of his trail of thoughts as he glanced at his pocket watch and saw it was about time he headed for Defence against the Dark Arts. He cast one last, disappointed, look at the book.

*'What a pity that I can't use this on Squibs...I'd get better results with an imperius.'* he thought, but filed away the information for later nonetheless.

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Harry joined his classmates in the Defence class and sat between Ron and Hermione. He didn't bother taking out his materials, and simply launched into a few furious whispers with his friends as they waited for the professor.

Finally, Lupin came in and, flashing a wink at Harry, told them they would be having a practical lesson this time.

The children followed Remus out of the classroom, and they reached the Staffroom, where Snape was stretched on an armchair. The potions professor left, but not before making several comments to embarrass Lupin and the Students.

Lupin went next to the Wardrobe, and it rattled, banging of the wall.

“In here” he said, pointing to it “Is a Boggart.”

Much of the class took a tentative step back, and after a series of questions and an overview of what a boggart is and how to combat it, Lupin cast a spell at the wardrobe, and it burst open, a mummy launching itself at Parvati.

“Riddiculus!” she bellowed, making the mummy get tangled in its bandages, and fall over.

The Bogart passed from person to person, and Harry prepared to somehow counter a dementor, thinking whether making it sing a lullaby would be a good idea.

Eventually, the boggart came to rest in front of him, and transformed to a tall, draped figure. The temperature in the room dropped by several degrees, and a dark mist covered the walls, dulling the light to the point that little was visible in the room.

Harry stood frozen as he gazed upon the figure. It moved closer to him, pulling back its hood slightly. Harry expected to see the nothingness of a dementor before it administered the kiss, but instead he gazed upon a pale face, with two red-slit eyes, a being guided by an unholy energy that was wrapped around him.

His eyes unconsciously moved further up, and he gazed upon the burning red lightning-bolt scar on the figure’s forehead. He gasped, and raised his wand, instinctively calling “Expecto Patronum!”

A blinding-white stag burst from his wand, charging at the figure, which faltered, and took a step backwards. But before Harry could act

further, Lupin strode forward, and placed himself in front of the boggart, which turned into a lunar sphere. Lupin banished it back into the cabinet and locked the door.

“Are you alright Harry?” he asked, looking concerned.

“Yes...I’m fine.” mumbled Harry, gazing apprehensively at the cabinet.

Lupin dismissed the class, and asked Harry to remain behind. He handed him a piece of chocolate, and asked him to sit down.

“A dementor eh? Interesting...the thing you fear the most is fear itself...” said the man encouragingly. Harry didn’t bother correcting him. It was better that they think he feared dementors rather than whatever that...*thing*...was.

“When did you meet a dementor anyway?” asked Lupin.

“There were some there when Sirius was being held in the Ministry.” lied Harry, producing a fake shiver and hoping Lupin wouldn’t enquire into the matter. It seemed that he succeeded, for the man simply nodded.

A few minutes later, Harry left the staff room for some lunch, and several questions from his classmates.

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For the third time that day, Ginny snapped her wand towards her target, shouting the incantation for a scorching hex. This time it worked, and a red bolt of energy hit one of the nearby wooden dummies, setting it on fire.

“Well done Ginny!” said Hermione “You’re the first one to get it.” she said, a small hint of jealousy in her voice.

“And it works perfectly too. You people keep on practicing, I’ll move on to the next spell with Ginny.” said Harry, leading Ginny to another side of the room of requirement, by a large, red tapestry embroidered with a golden eagle.

“Now, there’s a very useful shielding charm against solid objects” started Harry. “It will work against most objects, though, as you understand, the bigger or more magical the object, the more difficult it is to stop it. For example, it should be pretty easy to stop or deflect a muggle bullet, but not a muggle car.” Ginny nodded.

“Good. I’ll be testing you with pellets then. The incantation is Codecli, make sure you picture the shield in your mind.” he said, grabbing a handful of pellets.

“Codecli!” shouted Ginny, as Harry launched the pellets at her. A furious wind whipped around her, knocking the pellets away.

“Not bad, though with practice you shouldn’t need to create a whirlwind around you. Focus on making it more of an egg that covers you.” said Harry, as the two tried again.

Eventually, the other Shades managed to master the scorching spell, and moved over to Harry to try the new shielding charm. Soon, the air was filled with smashed pellets or other objects going off course.

“Right, Right, Enough!” said Harry, as he watched the mayhem. “I think we have it covered for today.”

“But you promised us a duel!” jumped in Ginny.

“But its late and there is Quidditch tommoro...” he tried to argue.

“You could beat them all with your eyes closed Harry. Now come on, you did promise us we’d get to have a fight.”

“Fine” said Harry. He snapped his fingers, and 8 of dummies suddenly started moving. “Lets see how well you fare against these...1, 2, 3, BEGIN!”

The wooden figures moved towards the surprised children. Ginny was the first one to react, and within a few seconds, she had already turned one of the dummies into a burning pile of charcoal.

Within a minute, all of the dummies had been dispatched.

“That wasn’t a real duel!” said Ginny, ignoring the pleading stare that a sweaty Ron gave her, as he nursed a bruise on his jaw.

“Okay, Okay. Ron, you go against Hermione, Neville, you fight Ginny.”

Soon, curses and hexes were flying around. Harry watched impressed as Hermione countered a particularly powerful bludgeoning curse from Ron with her shield. She staggered back several steps, and when Ron sent another curse towards her, Harry expected that would be the end of that battle.

Hermione however managed to flatten herself against the ground, and with a quick flick of her wand, she managed to win the duel in a way that would have given the twins cause to tease him for several weeks, had they known about it.

She simply summoned the spiders Harry kept in the nearby jars (the ones he used to test curse on, though no-one knew about that) and then sent them all towards Ron, who started performing a rather peculiar variation of the Tango dance. A simple expelliarmus later, and Hermione was declared the victor.

All three of them then turned to watch Ginny’s and Neville’s duel. Watching some of the spells flying, Harry frowned. They were both displaying an unusually high amount of power. He had become accustomed to expecting as much from Ginny, but even she was pressed to the limit to counter the barrage of spells that Neville was sending her way.

*‘They will grow into powerful people...all of them will.’* He thought, now watching the exchange with increasing concern as Ginny’s robe was singed.

The spells both parties were using were now powerful enough to cause some serious harm. Harry prepared to step in, when Ginny sent a storm of ice shards towards Neville, who summoned a shield in place. The ensuing whirlwind easily smashed them away, yet Ginny kept on sending more and more towards him.



The others watched this exchange with puzzlement. It seemed fairly pointless to waste so much energy in summoning things, when a simple shield could stop them. Soon however, the room's temperature began to fall, and an icy mist gathered around Neville. The wind that used to swirl around him had now become so cold, that Harry was sure he could hear Neville's teeth clattering, even though he couldn't see him through the mist.

Pointing her wand carefully at the mass of what now resembled a cloud, Ginny whispered, as silently as possible, a disarming hex. It wasn't particularly powerful, but combined with the advantage of surprise and Neville's frozen fingers, Ginny soon found herself holding two wands.

"Well" said Harry, sending a warming charm to a relieved Neville "That was certainly interesting. Nice strategy Ginny." He said to the girl, that now looked as if she wanted nothing more than to sink into the nearest warm place and let sleep overtake her.

Soon she, and the rest of the Shades, did just that.

Apart from Harry that is. He spent a long time that night meditating and reconstructing his mind barriers. To his dismay, he discovered that whatever he had done had caused it to become scorched.

He repaired it all, hopefully spelling the end of any future headaches, yet, despite his ordered mind and healthier than ever core, he felt as if something was missing, and something deep within him shivered as he felt the lingering presence of a former shadow. For a moment, he felt almost as if he was in front of that...*thing*...that his doggart had become in class earlier, but the feeling quickly disappeared, and he sank into unconsciousness.

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He dived, urging his broom to go faster. This was one match he didn't want to lose.

Keeping his mind focused on the golden ball fluttering in front of him, he barely heard Hufflepuff scoring and reducing the difference to 70-30. He ignored Diggory on his tail. The crowd, though louder than ever,

had long since gone silent to his ears. For once, his entire world was focused on a single, golden, point.

Stretching his arm beyond what he would have thought possible, and earning himself a strained forearm in the process, he managed to get that ball into its rightful place: his hand, giving Gryffindor the victory.

As if somebody had cranked the volume up, he suddenly became aware of the thunderous roars and shouts around him. Grinning victoriously, he drove his broom to a rapid descent, joining his teammates in the ground for a group hug, which was soon joined by the Gryffindors that jumped over the stands.

For this one, fleeting moment, Harry let his mind revel in victory, forgetting everything about the impending war. His grin faltered however, when he saw a pale Ginny hugging him as tightly as possible.

“Hey Gin...we won...it’s not like it was that dangerous a dive...”

“But....you...you fell...and there was this coldness...”

“I didn’t fall...”

“I know but...I saw you fall...and yet I didn’t...it was almost as if I was seeing two things at once.”

“Maybe you were just too worried?”

“Maybe...” she agreed, colour returning to her cheeks. “Well, I think that they are waiting for us up in the common room.”

“I’m sure.” said Harry, wincing as he rubbed his strained arm.

“You’ve managed to hurt yourself just getting a ball?” she asked incredulously.

“It’s just a little strain.” he said.

“Just a little strain!” she muttered, taking out her wand and moving it gently over his arm. “There. Now try to take care of yourself for at least one day will you?”

“I don’t think I can do that Ginny. You’ll just have to take care of me I guess.” he said, pulling her into a tight, one-armed hug. “Now, I heard the twins left to smuggle in some butterbeer...I think we should honour their effort by being present when they bring it up to the dorms.”

“Right you are Potter.” she said. “Last one to the tower is one-toothed squib!” she called, giggling and running up the stairs.

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‘*Watching Goblin Councils is boring.*’ decided Harry, as he watched some goblin named Berg rant on and on about how his cheese was better than his cousin’s Brag and how everyone should buy cheese from him.

Brag then cut in and started saying something about his great-great-grandfather’s toes, or something like that. ‘*If you ask me, their cheese looks exactly the same and smells like the Gryffindor’s Quidditch team’s locker room.*’

But still, he kept an impassive face and pretended to be interested, just like the goblins beside him were doing, as far as he could tell. Boring as it may be, he was happy that he had been invited by the goblin leadership to become an honorary advisor to the council.

It seemed strange that the Goblins would give such a position to a human, as that had only been done once before, with Gryffindor, but it seemed even stranger that they would give it to a 13-year old boy, even if he had helped them greatly.

From what Harry had learnt however, it turned out that the Goblin sages had made some prediction that he would be of indispensable help to the goblin nation...even if they were rather vague, the Goblins trusted their sages immensely, and Harry now sat in the annual, and rather long, council meeting in London’s Gringotts. Those sages were,

after all, the de-facto leaders of most goblin communities...even if the day to day workings of society were taken care of by others.

He had met many Sages and Council members, and while he was impressed by their wisdom, he still didn't understand some of the logic. The council had opened on a rather interesting discussion about the Goblin Rebels that wanted to take over and wage war against the humans, yet since then it had randomly jumped from matters like outstanding debts from various ministers to Berg and Brag's cheese conflict, which apart from being boring, had also began to make the room smell bad, as the two goblins had insisted upon bringing cheese samples with them.

So Harry now opted to think how he was going to sneak back into Hogwarts. Luckily, the Christmas break had begun, and he had told his friends that he wanted to spend the day alone because of some things he had to catch up on, but as it was nearing night time, he didn't know how well he would be able to fend off their questions.

His thoughts were interrupted by the head warlock, Gushend, as he ordered that the matter would be thought upon and that it was time for the two cousins to leave, which they did, after complaining loudly and being poked with some nasty looking enchanted spears.

Then talk seemed to turn once more to the rebels, and one of their attacks at some underground city. Harry watched the debate with interest. Despite these rebels having infiltrated almost every level of goblin society – he had already identified one within the council – outside society knew nothing about them.

Soon however, the meeting was over, and from what Harry understood, it was mere formality, as no decisions were taken on any matter, whether it be rebellion, new interest rates or smelly cheese.

He got up from his chair, and followed the crowd of short people to the exit, stopping every so often to have a few conversations. Now was the time the real decisions were made: each person approached the other, arranging specific meetings over specific matters. Left with nothing else to do, Harry decided to go to some of the goblin technicians, who were eager to show to him some of their newest machines, and ask his opinions of various enchantments.

Frankly, some of the projects they were working on were very impressive. Ultimately, some of them had the goal to build thinking and moving machines, willing servants, but they had run into several problems. He watched with interest how they had managed to create a mixture of organic substance and machine, but without somehow managing to create a creature with magical channels to join to their machine, their experiments were doomed, and they knew that.

At best, they would manage to make a temporary worker, which would last as long as the enchantment on it. For it to work longer it need life to sustain it...

*'Perhaps a captured soul would work, like what those ancient Egyptian mages used...but that would require some connection to a different plane, and they would be disobedient and dangerous...no, they would have to build life for it to work.'*

He gave them some useful details on various magical rituals forbidden to them by the ministry's oppressive rule. Yet, as they told him, "Magic, strong as it may be, cannot replace life...neither can a machine."

They then guided him to some other things they had developed, many of them sporting an obvious muggle influence. When asked about it, the goblins admitted to taking many muggle inventions and adapting them to their needs.

"Taking" in this case meant stealing, and from a list they handed to him, he saw that several institutions researching Artificial Intelligence had their data stolen. Their "Hit-list" as they termed it, was in fact the government's list of certified research institutions. Next to each lab, the goblins had written stories about their break-ins, many of which included posing as aliens.

Laughing, he asked for a copy, which he stuffed into his pocket, to peruse later at his leisure.

After passing by various offices to take care of some last minute affairs, and after being approached by many councillors on various mundane matters ranging from buying some ale to placing a bet on who would make the world Quidditch cup finals next year. (Where

Harry, armed with his knowledge, gleefully placed a large sum on Bulgaria and Ireland).

Finally, he escaped from the bank and, gazing at the snow falling from the dark sky, he apparated several miles to the north, to an even colder place, and pulled on his invisibility cloak.

15 minutes, and one, deliberate step on Mrs Norris's tail later, he entered the common room, and ignored the questions that his friends made, as he gleefully sank into the couch nearest to the roaring fire.

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